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The Lived Experience of Women with Children

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Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China: The Lived Experience of Women with Children

Yunyan Li

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law.

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Abstract

Several profound demographic and socioeconomic transitions that have taken place since the 1980s have reshaped the everyday lives of women with children in contemporary China, as has the interaction between the Chinese modernisation process and transforming Confucianism. This thesis aims to investigate and compare the implications of these shifting social, institutional, and economic dynamics on women using a multiscalar and mixed-methods approach. The methods include the descriptive data analysis of national datasets and the thematic analysis of policy documents, which explore the breadth of socioeconomic transitions. A qualitative case study approach is also used to collect empirical data from a city and a village in Guangdong province. Empirical data are collected via sixty-nine semi-structured interviews with 13 stakeholders and 56 individual informants, which captures the complex and multidimensional experiences of women with children. As the foundation of this study, the human dignity approach is applied and developed to explore five interlinked dimensions of these lived experiences: physical and psychological well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination, and equal value.

The findings of secondary data suggest that Chinese families have become structurally independent under the transformation to a state-led market economy and its interaction with family planning policies. However, the lived experiences show that receiving support from older parents (in-laws) is still central to women's coping strategies of the women to maintain care relationships, paid work, and further career development. The empirical evidence also reveals the rationale behind the different strategies, bringing to the fore how rural and urban women's heterogeneous experiences are reconfigured through the interaction of the social stratifications of gender, place, and generation (age). Furthermore, this thesis further elaborates on the impact of continuities and changes in the labour market and family practises in relation to women's self-determination in couple finance, household decision making, and parenting. Through rich empirical and theoretical analysis, this thesis has the potential to inform policy practises to address both institutional and spatial barriers facing women with children, promote the equal value of paid and unpaid care work, and meet women's changing needs in different dimensions of everyday life.

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I would like to thank those who have supported me throughout my years of study. But, most importantly, my gratitude to my caring and supportive supervisors, Professor Patricia Kennett and Professor Misa Izuhara. Their critical comments and insightful discussions have been extremely important to me to carry on and complete this thesis and inspire my future academic life. I also like to thank the academic and professional staff and PGR peers in the School for Policy Studies and Bristol Doctoral College for supporting me throughout these years. In particular, thanks to Jeab, Victoria, Jayu, Bongjo, Catalina, Rosalba, Eva, Qiru, Fengqiang, and many others for their great friendship.

This thesis is also dedicated to the women who have shared their untold stories about living in contemporary China. Thanks for their time, insights and inspiration to share their everyday lives. This research process has given me a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts and importance of women’s stories. As a social policy researcher, I believe in the value of equality and justice and hope for the positive impact of social policy in supporting people to move in a better direction, even though sometimes things are not as good as we expect. The responsibility and belief of being a social policy researcher inspire me to move the debate and policy practices forward and find more ways to make things work.

Finally, to my beloved family, my sister, father, and particularly my mother, who has encouraged and unconditionally supported me in pursuing my dream and living my life bravely. My partner, Benny, supports me with actions, introduces me to swimming, prepares many delicious foods, and is always by my side.

Covid-19 statement

Due to Covid-19, the empirical data collection has been moved online after late March 2020. Therefore, after receiving ethical approval for online data collection from the School, nearly one-third of the semi-structured interviews in this study were collected through telephone interviews. Before switching to online interviews, these interviewees were familiar with this research and I, as a researcher, through the community visit and the poster shared on the public notice board. However, the quality of these empirical data might be affected due to the lack of in-person interaction and social distancing. I have tried to ensure the consistency and quality of the empirical data and recognise the impacts of these changes brought in this study. The impacts are reflected and discussed in the methodology chapter in more detail. After the fieldwork, my supervisors and I continue our supervision online through Teams. Though there was a lack of physical contact with supervisors, the frequency and quality of supervision support and meetings were not affected. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, I continued attending the online training and workshops organised by Bristol Doctoral College and tried to receive peer support through online interaction.

Author’s declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University’s *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate’s own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Yunyan Li
DATE: 21st October 2022

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List of Glossary

Note: All terms are Mandarin Chinese.

changhuijia kankan fa	常回家看看法	Visit home and old family members often regulations
danwei	单位	Work units
fenjia	分家	Household separation
funü jiefang	妇女解放	Women liberation
gaige kaifang	改革开放	The reform and opening-up policy, also known as the Reform
hexie	和谐	Harmony
hukou	户口	Household registration system
jumin shebao	居民社保	*Resident Medical and Pension Insurance Schemes* are for non-working and informal employees groups
kaifang	开放	Open up
kuadai jiating	跨代家庭	Skipped-generation household
liudong renkou	流动人口	Floating population
nei	内	Inside
shehui zhuyi xinnongcun	社会主义新农村	New Socialist Villages
suzhi	素质	Quality of a person
suzhi jiaoyu	素质教育	Quality education for students' overall development in morals, well-being, capability and personality
wai	外	Outside, as an opposite concept of *nei*
xiagang	下岗	Lay-offs
xinxing nongcun yanglao baoxian	新型农村养老保险	*New-tyle Rural Pensions Scheme*
zhigong wuxian	职工五险	*Employee Five Social Security Insurance* is contributory and employment-based for those with formal employment contracts.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the thesis

Since the Chinese social and economic reform in the 1980s, the socio-economic transitions experienced by members of Chinese society have developed at an extraordinary pace. In its shift from a planned to a state-led market economy, China has witnessed unprecedented economic growth and structural changes that have been profoundly affected by an engagement with the global economy. This process has activated the domestic market and promoted urbanisation (Chan et al., 2008). Between 1980 and 2020, Chinese gross domestic product (GDP) per capita increased from around £160 to £8,680 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020a). The number of urban dwellers as a proportion of the total population increased from 25.8% in 1990 to 64.7% in 2021 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021a).

The state has also retreated from involvement in people's private lives in several ways. In urban China, the state has withdrawn the lifelong employment and universal welfare provisions in work units (*danwei*, 单位). In addition, it has introduced efficiency and market-oriented reform measures for state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to facilitate more competition in the marketplace. At the same time, people in rural China have experienced the de-collectivisation of farming land and the collapse of the collective production system in people's communes[1] (renmin gongshe, 人民公社; O'Leary and Watson, 1982). In terms of labour mobility, the implementation of the individual identity system in the 1980s loosened the control of the household registration system (*hukou*, 户口), which had previously regulated people's eligibility for working opportunities and welfare provisions based on their rural or urban residency. This change enabled rural residents to move more easily to urban areas, particularly the cities in southeast coastal provinces, in search of higher-paying jobs and more working opportunities. As Yan (2010) argues, these changes have provided individuals with more family and working-life autonomy, including more economic opportunities outside the work unit system and more freedom for population mobility across regions.

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[1] A rural people's commune is an economic and political organisation that unites individuals to work and live together without privately-owned property and objects. It also regulated housing, low-level but universal social security, education and childcare under the supervision of the Communist Party.

Several scholars have suggested that the economic reform and opening-up policy, or the Reform as it is also known and as it will be referred to herein, prioritised only economic modernisation and introduced limited public welfare, which turned China from a state-led egalitarian country during pre-reform China[2] into an increasingly divided and unequal one nowadays (He and Wu, 2015). Over four decades, the Gini coefficient (0 as perfect equality and 1 as maximal inequality), representing income inequality, rose substantially, increasing from 0.317 in 1978 to 0.465 in 2019 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020a). The rapid GDP growth and rising Gini coefficient both demonstrate the uncomfortable co-existence of significant economic growth and emerging social disparities. Beyond the increasing wealth gap, the Chinese have seen the rise of a 'divisive and discriminatory welfare system' (Chan et al., 2008). Chinese social insurance system (*shebao*, 社保), an urban- and employment-prioritised system, consists of two insurance systems that distinguish those with and without formal employment contracts and those with rural or urban residency. The first one, Employee Five Social Security Insurance[3] (*zhigong wuxian,* 职工五险), is contributory and employment-based for those with a formal employment contract. Another insurance system includes the resident medical and pension insurance schemes (*jumin shebao,* 居民社保) for non-employed groups or those working in the informal labour market: individual contributions and government financial subsidies with a lower refurbishment rate finance it. These institutionalised inequalities imply a significant gap in social security risks between rural and urban residents and between those with full-time and part-time employment and the unemployed.

The population strategy and family planning policies have also reshaped the Chinese demographic landscape, exemplified by the one-child policy implemented between the 1980s and 2015 (Feng et al., 2016; Cai, 2020). With the average household size declining from 4.41 in 1982 to 2.62 in 2020, Chinese families are moving towards a smaller, more nuclear family structure (Yu and Xie, 2018; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020b). However, the interaction of family planning policies and economic reform policies has not generated homogeneous results in rural and urban China. On the contrary, the varied institutional dynamics—including the household registration systems with residency-based welfare provisions, population mobility (mainly from rural to urban China) and differentiated family planning policies[4]—have had slightly different implications for family demographics across rural and urban China. For instance, larger family size is more common in rural China. In 2005, rural families had an average of 3.58 people/per household, while urban families (had 3.04 people/per household. A similar gap has remained stable over the last two decades (see more discussions in Chapter 5).

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[2] It is also known as socialist China or Mao's era, 1949–1976. The government in this period valued absolute equality and central governance. This period focused on Mao Zedong's socioeconomic movements, including land reform, the elimination of social class, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution (Mitter 2016).

[3] It includes the pension, unemployment benefit, maternity benefit, medical benefit and work-related injury insurance.

Whilst domestic migration from rural to urban China has led to a rise in skipped-generation households (*kuadai jiating*, 跨代家庭), with grandparents, particularly grandmothers, looking after dependant grandchild(ren) in the absence of parents, mainly in the villages (Guo et al., 2009; Wen et al., 2019). Socio-economic transitions have had different manifestations and trends across rural and urban China, and this is worthy of further investigation. This thesis aims to capture the contextual depth of such policies and reforms to understand women's heterogeneous experiences from a socio-spatial perspective in rural and urban China.

The economic and structural changes and shifting social norms have also reconfigured people's understandings of and behaviours relating to gender equality and the division of labour in contemporary China. Since the 1980s, economic reform has seen a weakening of the state's egalitarian discourse in terms of gender and the role of women in society (Wu, 2009). The narratives have shifted from the idea that 'women can hold up half the sky', which was prevalent before the economic reform, to 'women returning home' (Song, 2011) in the early reform period (1978–1993). This shift in narratives has served to uphold Confucianism as an important and re-emerging social dynamic in Chinese society, re-introducing the gendered division of labour in paid and unpaid care work (Maurer-Fazio et al., 2007; Li and Dong, 2011; Attané, 2012; Ji and Wu, 2018).

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[4] Urban China had the one-child policy, whereas rural China had a one-and-a-half child policy; this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, sub-section 2.1.3.

Rather than remaining static, Confucianism has been reshaped by the state ideology, which affects other spheres, particularly the labour market and the family. In the early 2000s, the government transformed a key element of Confucian values, harmony (*hexie*, 和谐), into the policy narratives and practices regulating 'harmonious society and family' (People's Daily, 2006), thereby attempting to de-escalate social conflicts. Since the 2010s, these narratives have been re-interpreted as more detailed 'core socialist values' (*shehui zhuyi hexin jiazhiguan*, 社会主义核心价值观) in regulating and reinforcing individuals' and families' commitment to promoting socio-economic development for Chinese society, as the highest priorities (State Council of China, 2013; State Council of China, 2016). Ranging from harmonious society to socialist core values promoted by the state, Confucian traditions have been reiterated in contemporary governance and policy narratives. In contemporary China, Confucianism argued as an instrument for the government, emphasises the state's interests, family cohesion and societal stability within the state-regulated social order instead of personal choice and autonomy (Cook and Dong, 2011; Chen et al., 2014; Fincher, 2014; He and Wu, 2015).

Within this nexus of economic, institutional and social dynamics, socio-economic transitions have introduced, and continue to introduce, profound shifts in women's everyday lives, and it is this issue with which this thesis engages. The current literature and debates have attempted to reveal women's socio-economic status and attitudes to gender equality in post-reform China. Typically, gender equality is investigated from the perspective of gender division of labour and labour market participation (Giddens, 1992; Tanabe and Tokita-Tanabe, 2003; Beck and Grande, 2010). However, such scholars as Yan (2010) and Zarafonetis (2017) observe that contemporary China does not always follow the same modernisation mechanisms and dynamics articulated in the literature that draws from a Western perspective. Like the demographic transitions in the Western modernised society, post-reform China has experienced and continues to experience a declining fertility rate and shrinking family size. However, these transitions in China have been affected by the implementation of the one-child policy (1980–2015), something that does not reflect people's intentions in relation to fertility practices but has nevertheless affected by the modernisation process (Gittings, 2006; Pan, 2006; Yu and Xie, 2018).

With regard to women in the labour market, the female participation rate was regulated by the Communist government in pre-reform China to accelerate economic development (Gittings, 2006). Scholars have suggested that after the reforms of the 1980s, the dismantling of the work units system and the marketisation of SOEs significantly reduced women's working opportunities in the public sector (Zuo and Jiang, 2009; Cook and Dong, 2011; Ji et al., 2017). As a result, there was a large-scale wave of lay-offs (*xiagang*, 下岗) during the early economic reform period that affected female employees with low skills and education levels. These women's domestic responsibilities were often cited as a reason for the layoffs (Appleton et al., 2002; Wu and Zhou, 2015). Post-reform China has experienced a continued decline in female labour market participation rates[5], from 73.02% in 1990 to 61.61% in 2021. However, compared with other East Asian societies, such as Japan (53.2%) and South Korea (53.3%) in 2021, post-reform China still features a relatively high proportion of female labour market participation (Statistics Korea 2021; Statistics Bureau of Japan 2022; National Bureau of Statistics of China 2022).

As Okin (1989) argues, women's labour market participation does not mean that women receive equal treatment and gain decision making autonomy equal to that of men. Scholars examining gender inequalities in the workplace have focused on the widening gender pay gap (Li and Dong, 2011), occupation segregation (Li and Xie, 2015) and barriers to women's career progression in the labour market (Chi and Li, 2008). More specifically, women are further disadvantaged, and their work has become more precarious under the expansion of the informal labour market, resulting in limited social security, lower pay and unstable working conditions (Solinger, 2002; Ding et al., 2009; Cao et al., 2010; Yuan, 2015; Wang and Klugman, 2020). According to the Survey on Social Status of Women in China 2010, regarding pension insurance coverage, women in informal employment are nearly 60 percentage points lower than those in formal employment (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2012). The medical insurance enrolment rate among these women working with informal employment is less than 20%. Meanwhile, the state has retreated mainly from funding public childcare services over the last two decades, with a significant drop in public-funded kindergarten, from 56.39% to 23.27% in urban China and 71.6% to 57.06% in rural China in 2020. With limited choices in sharing childcare, many women with children are potentially faced with more career interruptions and the possibility of having to remain unemployed after having children (Du and Dong, 2009; He and Wu, 2017).

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[5] This refers to the female labour force participation rate, defined as the percentage of the female population aged 15+ in employment.

It is widely argued that being a mother with multiple roles and responsibilities is associated with different forms of gender discrimination, particularly a more significant gender wage gap in the labour market (Zhang et al., 2008; Cook and Dong, 2011; Zhang and Hannum, 2015; Mu and Xie, 2016; Yu and Xie, 2018). This is also defined as the 'motherhood penalty' (Waldfogel, 1997), referring to mothers being more likely to experience lower income and stalled career progression than non-mothers. More specifically, these 'penalties' depend on these mothers' education attainment (Jia and Dong, 2013), work industry (Napari, 2010), marriage status (Glauber, 2007), children's age (Zhao, 2018), and living arrangements (Yu and Xie, 2018). Therefore, focusing on women (aged 22 to 40) with children can reveal the critical life transitions with multiple responsibilities to understand better the implications of shifting social, economic and institutional dynamics for women's daily lives.

As discussed previously, these socio-economic transitions have also witnessed continuities and changes with regard to social dynamics, including the retreat of the socialist gender-egalitarian ideology, the resurgence of Confucian traditions and the rapidly rising market neoliberalism (Walker and Wong, 2005; Zarafonetis, 2017). Not all Chinese women are affected homogeneously, and access to the increasing economic and social opportunities is not necessarily distributed equally to everyone. In the context of different forms of social disparities, women from different regions, different sides of the urban–rural divide, and different socio-economic backgrounds may experience opportunities and challenges in various ways. In this context, the modernisation process, women's multiple roles and responsibilities and the role of the Communist government have had substantial implications for the personal choices and strategies in women's everyday lives, which is the central concern of this research.

The case of China presents certain elements of socio-economic transitions that may inform the societies experiencing similar rapid shifts and modernisation paths that vary from those seen in the West. Tanabe and Tokita-Tanabe (2003) argue that the nature of modernisation in Western society and the traditions of Eastern society can engender a form of uncomfortable co-existence. During the economic reforms in China, the marketisation and privatisation processes have emphasised efficiency, competition and personal choices (Yan, 2016; Lindsey, 2019). There are also more educational resources and increased working opportunities in a market economy. However, the co-existence of the privatisation and marketisation process, transforming Confucianism and Communist governance discussed above, has defined and configured the uniqueness of the Chinese state-led modernisation agenda. As a result, the tensions and disjuncture between modernisation and transforming Confucian traditions often position women in a series of contradictory situations with more state-led Confucian morality and family responsibilities (Tam et al., 2014).

Previous research has rarely positioned women's everyday experiences in the context of the dynamic intersection between transforming Confucianism and the rapid modernisation processes seen under the Communist government. It has also overlooked the different implications of social, economic and institutional transitions for shaping women's heterogeneous and multi-dimensional experiences in contemporary China. To capture the complexities and multidimensionality outlined above, this research applies and develops the human dignity approach to explore a comprehensive understanding of women's everyday experiences. With a focus on individuals' autonomy and mutuality as human needs, this approach is also an important foundation of this study, which informs the philosophy and ontology of researching and understanding the everyday experiences of women with children via a multi-dimensional analytical framework. This framework focuses on women's everyday experiences via five coherent dimensions: physical and psychological well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value. Meanwhile, this study perceives these key dimensions not simply as a means to organise empirical data and present findings but also as a way to capture how women's multiple roles and responsibilities interact and reshape one another in contemporary China.

1.2 Aims, research questions and scope

As highlighted in the previous sub-section, women's everyday experiences are embedded in an uneasy co-existence between the state's intervention in family life, family commitment and increasing life chances to pursue socio-economic independence. This study is informed by these distinct characteristics in contemporary China and focuses on the following issues from temporal, spatial and gender perspectives: how the modernisation process interacts with transforming Confucianism; how women's everyday experiences are affected by these interactions and dynamics, and how they vary among different groups of women from rural and urban China; and how these existing institutions and policy practices are further reshaping the lived experiences of women with children. The aims of this research are as follows:

(1) To explore the strengths and weaknesses of the policy practices and institutions that support or challenge the everyday experiences of women with children, particularly in fulfilling their multiple roles and responsibilities in the family, the labour market and wider society
(2) To contribute to theoretical debates by developing and critiquing the human dignity approach to explore women's multi-dimensional experiences in well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value
(3) To contribute to the broader debates on gender justice in a state-led modernising society with well-entrenched Confucian values
(4) To contribute to policy debates by providing in-depth insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by women after becoming mothers

With a view to enhancing the existing literature and achieving the objectives delineated above, this study intends to address the following research questions:

(1) What is the relationship between transforming Confucianism and modernisation processes in contemporary China, and what are the implications of this relationship for gender justice in women's everyday experiences?
(2) What social, institutional and economic dynamics affect the everyday experiences of women with children in rural and urban areas?

(3) How have family, labour, and social security policies challenged or perpetuated patriarchy and gender justice in the labour market and family relations?
(4) What policies and practices in family and the labour market would promote and support gender justice in women’s everyday experiences?

To address the first question, this study explores socio-economic transitions, continuities and changes, and shifts in the old and the new order across time to reveal the implications of the interactions between Chinese modernisation and Confucianism. It also investigates policy stakeholders’ interpretations and practises of the existing family, labour and social security policies relevant to women’s welfare. Finally, it examines how women react to and reshape these experiences in a dynamic process involving two-way influence.

By applying and developing the human dignity approach (Chan and Bowpitt 2005) to address the second research question, this study investigates the multi-dimensional and multi-scalar everyday experiences of women with children, with a focus on physical and psychological well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value. The second research question has been developed to reveal the interaction of these key dimensions of women’s everyday experiences in the family, the workplace (if there are any) and wider civil society. It also compares women’s heterogenous experiences shaped by socio-spatial variations in rural and urban China.

With a focus on the practice of gender justice and patriarchy, the third research question explores how existing institutions and policy practices relevant to women and families interact with the competitive labour market and transform family demography and functionality. The final research question attempts to apply in-depth insights into women’s lived experiences into existing policy practices and inform policymakers regarding the institutional and geographical barriers facing women with children in contemporary China.

1.3 Methodology

This study adopts a multi-scalar perspective to capture these nuanced and complex dynamics to research women living in contemporary China. In particular, this study uses the mixed-methods approach with a two-stage research design to address the research questions in an interactive way (Creamer, 2018). First, secondary data—including national datasets,[6] policy documents and existing academic literature—are used to map a macro and national perspective of women's socio-economic status and the transitions in which women's everyday experiences are embedded. Then, a case study approach is applied, for which semi-structured interviews are conducted at two case study locations, including a city and a village in Guangdong province.

Guangdong province was one of the first coastal provinces in mainland China to implement the reform and opening-up policy. Its total GDP (1.62 trillion GBP in 2021) has ranked first in mainland China year-round since 1989, making it the largest economic province in China (Guangdong Province Statistical Bulletin 2021). However, similar to other economically developed provinces in China, it still experiences significant disparities across rural and urban areas (Chung and Unger, 2013). Two groups of interviewees—policy stakeholders and individual informants (women with at least one child)—were recruited for the semi-structured interviews across the selected city and village in this province. Purposive and snowball sampling strategies were applied to identify and recruit stakeholders and individual informants as interviewees. Limiting the recruitment of policy stakeholders and individual participants to two case study locations is more likely to minimise the influences of cross-provincial social and economic differences while capturing the contextual depth of rural and urban variations.

The interviews with policy stakeholders demonstrate the policy implementation process among bureaucrats at the street level. The fieldwork involves interviews with six urban and seven rural stakeholders recruited for the study. These stakeholders are from the Family Planning Office/Department, the village- or city-level China Women's Federation,[7] residential or village committees, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) specialising in women's welfare and family policies. The work performed by these stakeholders directly connects with family, labour policies and social security insurance relevant to women’s well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value in local residential districts. In addition, the stakeholders have professional and first-hand working experiences about the continuities and changes in the institutions and policies and how these policies are interpreted and implemented.

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[6] These datasets include China Census data from 1982, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2010 and 2020; the China Time Use Dataset 2008 and 2018; and the China Yearbook for 1980–2020. More details about the datasets are introduced in Chapter 4.

[7] All China Women's Federation (*zhonghua quanguo funv lianhehui*, 中华全国妇女联合会) is a state-led and supervised organisation that is responsible for implementing the national and local policies relevant to women's rights and welfare within the government guidelines.

At a micro level, women of different statuses—married or unmarried; with or without children; in young, middle, or old age—have varied experiences in Chinese socio-economic transitions and modernisation processes. Therefore, rather than covering all women, this study narrows its focus to women aged 22 to 40 with at least one child – referred to as mothers, in collecting semi-structured interview data. These women’s lived experiences are central to informing this study's empirical and theoretical development as the primary data sources. In terms of more specific profiles, this study also focuses on their household registration status (rural, urban or rural domestic migrants living in cities[8]), working status (working or non-working in the labour market) and household status (partnered or single-parent household). The fieldwork involves thirty-three women living in the urban case study locations (including ten migrants) and twenty-three women living in the rural case study location.

Throughout the data analysis, it is also important to maintain the complexity of the data while ensuring that they do not lose their replicability and robustness (Morse et al., 2002). The descriptive data analysis of quantitative datasets and thematic analysis of policy documents and interview data were coherently guided by the key dimensions informed by the human dignity approach.

1.4 Structure of the thesis: An overview

Chapter 2 locates this study in the existing literature and contemporary debates in the context of the interaction between modernisation and transforming Confucianism. This chapter includes three main sections that connect and provide an extensive review of the key themes of modernisation, Confucianism and gender dynamics. It first reviews the existing literature on the conceptualisation of modernisation and the manifestation of its process in contemporary China, with a particular focus on the impact of the reform and opening-up policy, family planning policies, and the intersecting dynamics in rural–urban divide, social divisions and gender. It then examines the literature on Confucianism, focusing on the relevant concepts in Confucian traditions and transforming Confucianism under the state's intervention. Finally, this chapter connects and integrates discussions about modernisation, transforming Confucianism and gender to identify the existing research gaps in researching women's lives in contemporary China and elaborates on the research questions accordingly.

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[8] In this study, rural domestic migrants living in cities are later referred as ‘migrants’ who have rural residency, live and work in urban China.

Chapter 3 explores and discusses the fundamental theoretical and analytical approach—specifically, the human dignity approach initially developed by Chan and Bowpitt (2005). This chapter first discusses the existing approaches to assessing the implications of welfare and policy practices on individuals. Then, informed by this approach, with a gender perspective, the following section conceptualises five dimensions to explore women's everyday experiences: physical and psychological well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value. Finally, referring to the literature discussed in Chapter 2, the last section elaborates on three intersecting and analytical layers that intersect with these dimensions when analysing and comparing women's experiences: gender and intergenerational interactions, spatial variations and transforming Confucianism.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology, methods and relevant issues in detail. It first introduces and justifies using mixed methods and the case study approach to address the research questions. It then goes on to illustrate the sampling strategies and demonstrate how these strategies are informed and guided by the human dignity approach. This chapter also explains how the secondary data, including national statistics and policy documents, are accessed and how the data collection and analysis process was performed for the semi-structured interviews. Finally, this chapter discusses the researcher's self-reflection, ethical issues and the limitations of the research design, especially in the context of carrying out fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With a focus on the key themes informed by the human dignity approach (Chan and Bowpitt, 2005; Chan et al., 2008), chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the findings from the analysis of quantitative datasets, policy documents and semi-structured interviews to unpack the lived experience of women with children. Based on the empirical data from semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and secondary data drawn from national datasets and policy documents, Chapter 5 discusses the demographic and socio-economic transitions relevant to women's family life and their situations in the Chinese competitive labour market. It also illustrates how stakeholders interpret these continuities and changes relating to women's welfare and gender justice and practise these understandings in their professional working experiences. In addition, this chapter elaborates on how the manifestation of modernisation in the family nuclearisation process and the shifting market economy interact with transforming Confucianism re-configured and practised in an authoritarian approach. In contemporary China, families with less stability have contradicted the national narrative of a 'harmonious family' and family solidary in the context of the unchanged family responsibilities as primary welfare providers. This chapter addresses the implications and relations of modernisation and transforming Confucianism, providing a national and macro context for understanding the lived experience of mothers in chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 6 illustrates women's varied coping strategies in care and paid work arrangements with the family and available social resources. These strategies include full support from family and making full use of family resources and private services in the market. However, there are also compromised care relations and career interruptions due to unsolved challenges in time and finance. In particular, this chapter highlights how women with multiple roles and responsibilities practise care relations with their dependants, negotiate the division of labour with the male partners, and maintain a boundary between the nuclear and extended family after becoming mothers. This chapter also compares women's heterogeneous experiences, which illustrates how these experiences vary owing to the intersecting dynamics of family resources, spatial variations in the rural–urban divide and a competitive and segmented labour market.

Chapter 7 incorporates in-depth discussions on the equal value of paid and unpaid care work, self-determination in couple finance, household decision making, intergenerational interactions and parenting. It first addresses the continuities and changes in couple finance and the socio-economic dynamics of shaping different strategies to maintain household income. This chapter argues that in the Chinese modernisation process, women and their nuclear families experience more childcare and financial dependence on older parents (in-laws) though there are different ways of practising these intergenerational interactions. This chapter elaborates on how these gender and intergenerational interactions affected by policy practices present different opportunities and challenges that reshape women's self-determination in the family and workplace.

By connecting the findings in this study and the existing literature, Chapter 8 Discussion maps out the interaction between the Chinese modernisation process and transforming Confucianism and its implication for women's multi-dimensional lived experiences. It brings together the findings in Chapters 5 to 7 and discusses them in these five dimensions: physical and psychological well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value, which intersect with the analytical layers in the Chinese context. Chapter 9 Conclusion highlights the key findings and contributions of this study, which elaborates on the broad picture of the relations between Chinese modernisation and transforming Confucianism and broadens the knowledge of its impacts on gender justice in contemporary China. Finally, it draws together the different stances of the research and considers the implications for policymaking and implementation, the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research agendas.

Chapter 2 Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice: Making the Connections

Introduction

The everyday experiences of women in China are embedded in the Chinese context, where the modernisation process and well-entrenched Confucian values have dynamically reshaped the socio-economic landscapes to different extents. To introduce, analyse and connect the debates that inform this study, this chapter begins by reviewing the literature and research on modernisation and its implications in contemporary China. Different social contexts present different paths to modernisation (Martinelli, 2005). As a broad and complex term, *modernisation* is debated from various perspectives, informing discussions on the manifestation of Chinese modernisation (2.1.1).

The reform process in the 1980s instigated a period of unprecedented economic growth and significant societal change in China. Modernisation has brought rapid economic, social and institutional continuities and changes in contemporary China (He and Wu, 2017). The reform and opening-up policy have profoundly affected the Chinese modernisation process, bringing a competitive labour market forward and highlighting social and spatial disparities under state intervention (2.1.2). In addition, the shifting family planning policies and population strategies, where families are encouraged to have fewer to more children, have significantly reshaped a series of social demographic transitions in family formation, family structures and living arrangements (2.1.3). Along with these socio-economic transitions, intersecting dynamics of social stratification (Li, 2013b) and regions (Pan, 2017) are significant in the Chinese modernisation process. With particular attention paid to the rural–urban divide, reviewing the contemporary research that debates these dynamics provides a contextual depth for analysing social stratification as a process and result of the Chinese modernisation agenda (2.1.4).

In addition to the socio-economic structural transitions, Confucianism—as an influential aspect of Chinese culture—has been rooted in Chinese society from the past to contemporary China after the Reform, affecting individuals, families and the state in formal and informal ways (2.2.1). Recent research has demonstrated how Confucianism has also been studied as a welfare paradigm in shaping the political dynamics in East Asian societies (Jones, 1993; Walker and Wong, 2005). As discussed in the existing literature (Bell, 2010; Zhang, 2013), in the Chinese context, transforming Confucianism has been instrumentally woven into the Chinese modernisation process in different forms at the collective and individual levels. It is an essential framework and analytical layer by which to understand Chinese socialist governance and authoritarian politics (2.2.2). Hence, the interaction between transforming Confucianism and the modernisation process is the focus of this study. In particular, the key concepts in Confucian traditions, including filial piety and patriarchy, are explored to understand the shifting family practices in women's everyday experiences (2.2.3).

Section 2.3 links the discussion about gender, the Chinese modernisation process and the transformation of Confucianism. A wide range of literature reviews and discusses the shifting gender ideology and practices, ranging from the Chinese state's gendered discourse about 'iron women' to the constructed 'good mother' role in the marketisation process (2.3.1). Another important theme, state-led Confucianism and public patriarchy shaped by the government are in close connections to the social and power dynamics at a macro level in configuring gendered practices (2.3.2). The final sub-section, 2.3.3, summarises the debates and identifies the research gaps, which informs the focus of researching the lived experiences of women with children in this study.

2.1 Modernisation in China

2.1.1 The debate and conceptualisation

The term *modernisation*, which has alternatively been termed Westernisation (Huntington, 1996; Rist and Camiller, 2019), has been used to describe the changes and expansion in industrialised countries, including countries in Western Europe, Scandinavia, North America and Oceania (Hayek, 1982; Hayek, 1990; Durkheim, 1997; Pierson, 2006). Based on the Western industrialisation process, the initial discussion about the modernisation process began with capital accumulation and then concentrated on the implications of social transformations, for instance, the level of urbanisation and education development (Lipset, 1994; Giddens, 2002; Huntington, 2006). In the 1950s, relevant modernisation theories were also applied to study developing countries and label the transitions towards modernisation in different social contexts from a Western-centric perspective (Wallerstein, 1979; Randeria, 2002). However, more scholars have criticised the unified and dichotomous assumptions in previous theories, arguing that models presented by Western countries are not the only path towards modernisation in developing countries (Allen et al., 1992; Giddens, 1992; Moore, 1993; Giddens, 2002; Martinelli, 2005).

In a global context, more studies suggested alternative paths toward post-communist modernisation in Russia and Eastern Europe after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005). Other societies, including Latin America and Arab countries, also show complex and varied pictures in relation to understanding and experiencing modernisation (Stepan et al., 1973; El-Ghannam, 2001; Moten, 2005; Collier, 2010; Lane, 2011). These debates and reconstructions of modernisation stimulate the need for a re-examination of the heterogeneous and multi-faceted modernisation process among developing and non-Western countries. Beyond economics, more scholars also pay attention to the implications of politics and culture on modernisation across different societies (Lipset, 1994; Inglehart and Norris, 2005; Inglehart and Welzel, 2010). The complications in these multiple modernisation paths and plural modernities show that modernisation is no longer defined by Western values or defined only through economic and technological development (Randeria, 2002). Instead, they have suggested that the pervasiveness of modernisation requires a pluralistic way of understanding the transformation of different societies.

Contemporary debates have also turned their attention to the tensions, differences and unevenness evident in the co-existence of tradition and modernity in the modernisation process (Wittrock, 2000). In recent discussions, Martinelli (2005) has defined the modernisation process as the totality of the interaction and combination of social, economic, political and institutional transitions. This process fosters the emergence of 'a distinctive way of social organisation' (Martinelli, 2005) that is different from traditional societies. The current debates have challenged the dichotomic assumptions of the clear boundary between the old and the new and between traditions and modernisation. Rather than defining modernisation broadly, this study recognises modernisation as a historical, nuanced and heterogeneous process in which the interactions of social, economic and political transitions shape different societies in varied ways and across different dimensions.

As Martinelli (2005) summarises, top-down and state-led modernisation processes draw on alternative strategies to address the co-existence of economic development and political authoritarianism. Therefore, it is essential to investigate how modernisation processes and remaining authoritarian political structures co-exist and reconfigure more non-Western experiences to enhance understanding of these debates. As a state-led, modernising country and a Confucianism-embedded society (Martinelli, 2005), contemporary China is the representative case whereby the state progressively promotes the active market and preserves authoritarian control of the single-party political structure with modest welfare provisions. Exploring the case of China contributes to deepening and broadening discussions about the contextualised understanding of divergence and convergence between the Western and non-Western modernisation processes. The following sections consider the discussion on the nature of the Chinese modernisation process, particularly with regard to the reform and opening-up policy and the family planning policy implemented in China's reform periods from the 1980s.

2.1.2 The Reform and opening-up policy

The literature on the manifestation of Chinese modernisation pays significant attention to the different forms of socio-economic disparities and transitions affected by the reform and opening-up policy. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping, as the new Chinese leader, implemented the reform and opening-up policy (*gaige kaifang*, 改革开放); this signified a profound shift from a planned economy to a market economy under the regulation and supervision of the state. This shift also saw a socio-economic transformation from a socialist society to one characterised by state-led marketisation and modernisation (Chan et al., 2008). The following discussions connect the literature on the Chinese marketisation process with restructuring economics in the public and private sectors and welfare reforms as part of the manifestation of the Chinese modernisation process that was significantly affected by this national policy.

Chan et al. (2008:27) divide the reform periods (1978-) in contemporary China into three stages. These are the early reform period (1978–1992), the transition period after 1993, and the rapid modernisation period since the 2000s. The early reform period focused on reconstructing urban SOEs and transforming them into private and modern enterprises (Wang, 1994 also see Table 2.1 for the periodisation of Chinese modernisation concluded by the author). Rapid economic development and urbanisation were the main priorities (Chinese Communist Party Congress 1984, 1985). To motivate the autonomy of the private sector to its fullest extent, the state published the regulations for, and rights of Chinese private enterprises in the late 1980s. This change significantly boosted the privatisation process by enabling a rapid increase in private enterprises, the number of which increased 15 fold during the 1990s (Kanamori and Zhao, 2004). By 2018, the gross value of private enterprises accounted for 49.7% of the total assets of non-financial enterprises (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2019a).

Chinese society also draws on repertoires of politics that are different from other East Asian societies: the communist party is powerful in affecting the market (Besharov and Baehler, 2013). The state has progressively driven a ‘socialist market economy’ that introduced competition, participated in the global economy, and maintained the ‘state’s regulatory power’ (Chinese Communist Party Congress 1993). The state’s regulatory power refers to the Chinese Communist Party‘s power to regulate and intervene in the market whenever needed (State Council of China, 1993). Pan (2017) suggests that the Chinese privatisation and marketisation processes represent an ambiguous boundary between the state’s intervention and the market mechanism. The socialist market economy features dynamic interactions between market mechanisms, neoliberal ideas and practices, e.g., marketisation and engagement with globalisation, and an authoritarian political context under the state’s supervision.

Table 2.1 Periodisation of the Chinese Modernisation Process 1949-Present

Timeframe	Institutions and policy practice toward modernisation
Pre-reform period 1949-1978	• Labour policy: Lifetime employment in work units in urban China and collective agricultural production in people's communes in rural China • Economic policy: Closed-door policy • Welfare system: a low-level socialist welfare system based on employment status; Work-unit centric welfare protection • Politics: Centralisation, unified management and authoritarian control from the state and Cultural Revolution
Post-reform periods	
1978-1992 (The earlier stage of reform)	• Labour policy: Withdrawal of lifelong employment and job allocations; Promotion of short-term 'employment contract' • Rural economic reform: Household Responsibility System • Urban economic reform: Contract Responsibility System (CRS) in State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs); Laid-off waves (State Council of China, 1998) • Economic policy: The publication of the 'Temporary Ordinance on China's Private Enterprises' and introduce the market mechanism • Welfare system: Employment-based and depending on the employers; Introduction of old-age pension scheme for urban workers (State Council of China, 1991) • Population policy: One-child policy in urban China and 1.5-children policy in rural China (1978-2015) • Politics: Decentralisation with fragmentation (Chan et al., 2008)
1993-2005 Transitioning periods, also, Jiang Zemin's era	• Economic policy: Joined World Trade Organisation in 2001; Prioritised the development of cities and coastal provinces; Enhanced 'socialist market economy' with private sector expansions (State Council of China, 1993) • Labour policy: Growing informal and short-term employment; Establishment of the Labour Law for workers' rights (National People's Congress 1994) • Welfare system: Establishment of a 'social security system with Chinese characteristics'[9]; Basic health insurance scheme in urban China and a New Rural Cooperative Medical Scheme in rural China (State Council of China, 2003)

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[9] The government established the low-level social protection schemes for urban residents. The first one was the basic living guarantee system for urban laid-off workers. The second one is the unemployment insurance and the third one is the Minimum Standard of Living Scheme (MSLS).

2005-2012 Hu Jintao's era	• Economic policy: Intervention of the privatisation process and promote regional equality in economic growth; Establishment of more free trade zones and regions (State Council 2006) • Welfare system: Development of more comprehensive medical insurance and pension schemes across rural and urban China • Politics: Harmonious society and sustainable development
2012-present Xi Jinping's era	• Economic policy: move toward a moderately prosperous society (*xiaokang shehui,* 小康社会)[10] • Politics: Anti-corruption movement; administrative reform and the reduction of government agencies; 'Socialist core values' • Population policy: Two-child policy (2016) and three-child policy (2021)

The privatisation process occurred in tandem with dismantling the previous socialist welfare basis, shifting the responsibility for welfare provision away from the work units and towards individuals, families and other non-state employers. During the period of Socialist China (1949-1978), urban workers in SOEs were entitled to guaranteed lifelong employment and comprehensive benefits, which included coverage of sick leave, maternity leave, medical care and a pension. Collective welfare facilities covering public housing, communal dining halls, nurseries and schools were recognised as generous state-led de-familisation measures through which the government took more responsibility for household work from families to encourage full labour market participation (Shi, 2012; Shi, 2021; Hong and Ngok, 2022). After the Reform in the 1980s, the Chinese Communist Party highlighted the Chinese government's strong desire to move forward and become a prosperous country and achieve economic growth (Chinese Communist Party Central Committee 1981). The socialist welfare benefits, which were central to the people's communes and state-owned enterprises, gradually collapsed and were disintegrated as a result of the reconstruction of SOEs and the Household Responsibility System, also referred to as the contract responsibility system[11] (*jiating lianchan chengbao zerenzhi,* 家庭联产承包责任制), in order to accelerate economic growth and promote efficiency.

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[10] This goal was proposed in the mid-1990s and the CCP aimed to achieve this status by 2020 (Xi 2017).

[11] Implemented in 1978, this system allowed farmers to cultivate their land and sell their surplus products for profit based on their household unit if they had fulfilled the government's predetermined tasks of producing agricultural products (Liu 1992). This meant that what to plant and how to make full use of the farmland was decided by the household rather than by the collective communes.

Whilst the reform and opening-up policy shifted the dynamics of state-family relationships, and reducing the state's welfare support expanded self-reliance and family responsibilities. In this process, the withdrawal of the state from providing public resources, as one of the many aspects of the welfare reforms, made the family a more significant and prominent welfare provider. The labour market reforms and labour policy changes were also accompanied by increasing unemployment as workers in the reconstructed SOEs experienced extensive lay-offs (Lin et al., 2020). Alongside these developments came a growing recognition of the welfare needs of this unemployed and laid-off population. Between the late 1980s and early 2000s, the number of laid-off workers (*xiagang gongren*, 下岗工人) remained between 7 and 9 million per year (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020c).

In the early reform period (1978–1993), there was evident discontinuity between the slowly developed welfare system and the emerging social risks in the labour market. In 1991, urban SOEs launched a pension scheme for urban employees to ensure their primary financial stability. However, rural labourers did not receive the same attention in terms of social protection as their urban counterparts (Chen et al., 2016). In terms of medical care, the local government had to establish a strategy to respond to the gap left by the withdrawal of public funding, which reconfigured the medical service provision across the regions, resulting in different levels and varying quality of services according to local financial capabilities. By focusing on the informal labour market and the social security of temporary staff, Owen and Yu (2003) and Meng (2012) found that unskilled workers and domestic migrants faced a higher risk of extreme poverty and essential medical and housing protection deficiencies.

Owing to the lack of regulations in regard to employment protection and social security in a competitive labour market, the expansion of private businesses brought new risks related to overtime and a bigger workload, lack of pensions and medical protection, and increasing temporary work contracts. As Chan et al. (2008) argue, after the Reform, the dismantling of the socialist welfare provisions that had been established in pre-reform China produced increasing social and regional disparities between the rich and the poor and between cities and villages. Nowadays, urban income levels are still 2.55 times higher than rural ones (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020a). Despite the rapid and significant economic growth nationwide, socio-economic development did not benefit everyone equally in this modernisation process.

The economic reform in 1978 brought the socialist welfare to an end and a move towards workfare, highlighting employment-based social insurance and a production- and growth-oriented regime based on individual responsibility. This welfare system also links to productivism, a policy strategy and belief that prioritises production activities in adult life (van der Veen and Groot, 2006). Productivism has been an important element in contemporary debates about welfare systems and reforms. East Asian welfare systems, specifically Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea, were commonly recognised as productivist welfare systems with a 'growth-oriented' strategy , i.e. the prioritisation of economic growth and a secondary role for social policy (Wilding, 2008; Lue and Park, 2013; Hudson et al., 2014). After the economic crisis in 1997, more studies focused on transitory East Asian welfare regimes and investigating the variations of these regimes by analysing two aspects of social policy, namely, productive and protective social policy (Hudson and Kühner, 2010; Choi, 2012; Hudson et al., 2014; Chu, 2016). Choi (2012) examines the transformation of East Asian welfare regimes and suggests that, since the 1990s, East Asian societies have been trying to and are moving away from their productivist nature and formulating their own welfare states and trajectories with different combinations of productive and protective policies under different political and institutional contexts.

A wide range of prevalent studies have also moved these debates forward with rich empirical evidence over the last decade. To measure the extent to which East Asian welfare regimes (still) have a productivist nature, Yang (2017) used a fuzzy-set ideal type to explore old age income protection, public rental housing, and passive labour market policy as protective policies, and education, health care and family policy as productive policies in China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. Drawing on the findings, Yang (2017) argued that Greater China and East Asia have been developing distinctive social policy trajectories with varied combinations of 'productive' and 'protective' policies. In recent research, Yang and Kühner (2020) compare the retrenchment and expansion of both 'productive and 'productive' policies in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. Empirical evidence suggests that these societies have been taking different approaches, for example, China has focused on expanding ‘protective’ welfare areas to address social risks while Singapore and Japan have expanded their family policies, in particular with significant retrenchments in education and housing in Japan, and remain residual in old age and labour market policy in Singapore. East Asian societies, including China, have experienced shorter economic development and modernisation with an uneasy co-existence of immature welfare institutions and rising social risks coming from the modernisation process, e.g., poverty, social disparity, and the ageing populations (Kühner, 2015).These studies tend to agree on the departure of a homogeneous welfare model in East Asia and the development of new welfare regimes across these societies to accommodate these rapid socio-economic changes, despite their similarities in terms of their cultural foundations.

In the case of modernising China, the Chinese welfare system has not been static but has witnessed prominent changes over time. Yang and Kühner’s (2020) findings illustrate that China has shifted from a weak productive mode, referring to more productive than protective welfare in the 1990s, to a weak protective model referring to more protective than productive welfare in the 2010s, and then a balanced model with limited but similar levels of protective and protective welfare nowadays. Over the last two decades, the Chinese government has intentionally transformed its welfare system from a formal employment-based (or work unit employment-based) one to a more inclusive, state-led and individual-based scheme to respond to these emerging social risks and tensions arising from Chinese modernisation and marketisation (State Council of China, 2002; State Council of China, 2003). Chinese social insurance, as a ‘market-oriented welfare measure’ (Chan et al. 2008: 40), was established in the early 2000s and requires the contribution of both employers and employees to cover the unemployment, medical, pension, work-related injury and maternity schemes. This process aligns with the emerging concepts of ‘scientific development and harmonious society’ (State Council of China, 2006) and ‘socialist core values’ (State Council of China, 2013) and the goal of moving towards a moderately prosperous society (Xi 2017). Hong and Ngok (2022) describe the period from 2000-2020 as a ‘social policy era’ with significant welfare expansion in China. As Guo and Zhao (2022) argue, this transition demonstrates the state’s intention to accommodate greater social rights under an authoritarian political background. However, it remains the case that only those making an economic contribution through employment are entitled to a higher level of protection and standard of living.

The economic and welfare reform have significantly impacted Chinese society in general and women's experiences in the family context and the workplace in particular. Studies on women working in the public sector argue that in the early economic reform period, the socio-economic status of women deteriorated significantly in the context of the withdrawal of welfare provisions and the reduced job opportunities in SOEs (Dong et al., 2006; Lee and Warner, 2007; Maurer-Fazio et al., 2007; Du and Dong, 2009; Attané, 2012). Since the economic reform, the SOE sector has consistently declined, with its share of total industrial output dropping from 77% in 1978 to 33% in 1996 (Naughton 2007; Li and Putterman 2008). In addition, a wide range of research has found that women are more likely to be made redundant, face more challenges when trying to re-enter the labour market and remain unemployed for longer (Solinger, 2002; Dong et al., 2006; Ding et al., 2009; Du and Dong, 2009).

Based on 15,600 household data across 71 cities, Wang (2003) reveals that women represented up to 63% of laid-off workers in 1990. In terms of women's paid work in the competitive labour market in a market economy, Yuan and Cook (2010) reveal evidence that women are more likely to work 'flexibly'—for instance, by taking temporary and part-time jobs in an insecure and informal labour market. However, the economic reform in the private labour market has also brought a series of work and business opportunities that are ability-oriented and competition-based (Li and Dong, 2011; Li and Xie, 2015; He and Wu, 2017; Ji et al., 2017). The current research suggests that there is a complex and conflicting socio-economic context in which women have more economic opportunities and face more challenges due to the varied implications of the economic reform in the Chinese modernisation process.

There are also different manifestations of the reform and opening-up policy in rural and urban China. The implementation of the Household Responsibility System has challenged the top-down control from the state in rural families' social production. At the same time, it has not changed the male-headed household and male-only land inheritance traditions in this system. A higher proportion of women who remained in their villages still worked in the agricultural industry than their male counterparts, contributing to the gender income gap in rural China (Sargeson, 2012). Rural women did benefit from the expanding village and township enterprises and access to urban working opportunities (Song, 2017). However, persistent gender discrimination meant that rural women did not have the same options as men; moreover, the household registration system meant that they did not have the same options as urban female residents either (see sub-section 2.1.4; Ji and Wu, 2018). As these studies show, in the context of the differentiated welfare provisions and household registration systems, the economic reform in contemporary China did not manifest equal life chances and opportunities. Instead, it resulted in more emerging disparities for women living in rural and urban China.

2.1.3 Family planning policies and demographic transitions

As another influential national policy in contemporary China, the one-child policy implemented between 1980 and 2015 reshaped the Chinese socio-economic landscape and demographic transitions. In the early 2010s, in the face of declining fertility rates, a decreasing workforce and an ageing population, the government steered the population strategy from having fewer children to having more children. With the implementation of the two-child policy in 2016 and the three-child policy in 2021, women face fewer fertility restrictions intervened by the state. Still, this change must be contextualised against the one-child policy as it brings additional complexity and uncertainty to how women view paid work and family life. As Qian and Jin (2018) suggest, women’s economic resources and the growing gender inequalities in labour markets are influential in women’s responses toward having a second birth (Mausbach et al., 2012). Notably, Huang and Jin (2022) show empirical evidence that the universal two-child policy reduced female employment by about 4% and women’s labour income by 10%. These economic losses are more significant among those under 25 and those with higher educational attainment. These shifting implementations and the implications of family planning policies are crucial to understanding Chinese families in transitions and their impacts on women in the Chinese modernisation process.

Between 1980 and 2015, the government strictly implemented the one-child policy in urban China. Through enforced monthly pregnancy tests, the one-child policy enforcement was much more stringent for those working in the public sector and SOEs (Cao, 2017). In focusing on family practices, several commentators have investigated the positive and unexpected impacts of the one-child policy and the relevant population strategies (Fong, 2002; Won and Fong, 2014; Whyte et al., 2015). Appleton et al. (2009) studied well-educated and affluent families in urban China. They found that families with more socio-economic resources, such as those working in the public sector and serving as Communist Party members, benefited more from the economic reform than those with comparatively fewer resources, particularly those working in the informal labour market. As a result, the next generations from these better-off families, notably the single child, receive more resources and can access opportunities during rapid economic growth (Sun, 2011; Liu, 2017).

In urban China, the belief in 'quality education'[12] (*suzhi jiaoyu*, 素质教育) and concentrated resources for the only child, regardless of gender, promoted equal treatment between sons and daughters and weakened the practices of son preference rooted in Confucian traditions (also see discussions in section 2.2.3; Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005; Won and Fong, 2014; Ling, 2017). There was also less competition from male siblings in smaller family sizes (Fong, 2002; Evans, 2007; Wang and Feng, 2021). Consequently, urban singleton daughters have benefited from family and public education resources to improve their human capital and receive equal education to their male counterparts (Mu and Xie, 2016; Hu, 2017).

The social and economic setting in rural areas, including the unchanged male-heir inheritance of communal land and the demand for the male agricultural labour force, made rural residents more resistant to implementing the one-child policy (Sargeson, 2012). In rural China, the state had to accommodate the entrenched son-preference traditions instead (see sub-section 2.2.3) with the '1.5-children policy' (Gu et al., 2007) that allowed rural families to have another child if their first child was a daughter. In the late 1990s, most urban families only had one child and smaller family size, whereas having only one child was rare among rural families (Deng et al., 2019). As a result, rural women have not necessarily benefited from the shrinking family size and less competition from male siblings as their urban counterparts did (Liu and Erwin, 2015). Many scholars examine the negative effect of this compromised family planning policy in terms of skewed sex ratios (Hull, 1990; Murphy, 2003; Loh and Remick,

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[12] Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005) discuss the emerging national discourse of 'quality education', which requests that the single child shall be raised and educated with quality educational resources and parenting practices. See further discussions in sub-section 2.3.1.

2015), sex-selective abortion (Croll, 2006; Goodkind, 2011) and undocumented children (Ebenstein, 2010) under rural male-head household system privileging men's property and inheritance rights. The interplay of these unchanged social and institutional structures and policy practices has perpetuated and reinforced the practices of son preference in Confucian traditions (Wang, 2009; Jiang et al., 2011). Informed by these varied implications of family planning policies, it is crucial to explore these gender consequences regarding access to family resources, demographic landscape and different forms of gender discrimination, which have reshaped rural and urban women's heterogeneous everyday experiences.

Whilst the total dependency ratio between the non-working and the working population increased from 42.2% in 2002 to 45.9% in 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2020a). In particular, the old-age dependency ratio[13] rose from 10.4% to 19.7%, whereas the child dependency ratio[14] declined from 31.9% to 26.2% (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2020a). Strained tensions emerge between the increasing care needs and the limited capability of family-based welfare provision in the context of these demographic transitions (Walker and Wong, 2005; Evans, 2007). Yan (2016) also argues that the existing welfare system is insufficient to bridge the care gap left by the state's retreat in public care services and the slowly growing social services in the market.

Scholars find that though facing challenges and ambivalence in sharing family support, many Chinese families have strategically enhanced their intergenerational solidarity to address the increasing care responsibilities in varied ways (Qi, 2015; Eklund, 2018; Liu et al., 2020). Rather than moving towards a more independent society, Chinese families have experienced a return to reliance on family resources and a shift from the state-socialist model towards re-familisation. According to contemporary debates, despite the uncertainties about how the manifestation of family functionality and relations have been reshaped, family support has been and continues to be important. This process implies potential contradictions between the unchanged family roles and responsibilities as primary welfare providers and the intentions for independent family relations in shifting modernised ideologies (Xu et al., 2014).

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[13] This refers to the proportion of the population aged 65 years compared with that aged 15–64 years.

[14] This refers to the proportion of the population aged 0–14 years compared with that aged 15–64 years.

To enhance the understanding of Chinese families in transitions and its impacts on women with children, Section 2.2 will further connect and review the literature on transforming Confucianism and shifting family practices in the Chinese modernisation process.

2.1.4 Intersecting dynamics of stratifications: Region and gender

In the context of developed countries, particularly Europe and America, Rubin et al. (2014) argue that social divisions and socio-economic status are the results of the interaction between 'social, cultural and economic backgrounds' (196), which are influential in affecting individuals' behaviours. These are often closely related to valued resources in a marketised society and are defined by a number of relevant factors, including property ownership, occupation and skills (Giddens, 1971; Wright, 1997; Mahalingam, 2003; Cohen et al., 2017). An alternative understanding of these stratifications recognises the production and reproduction of social inequality in terms of access to resources through economic, political and social power (e.g. reputation) (Weber and Tribe, 2019). In contemporary China, alongside the economic reform and shifting family planning policies, the socio-economic landscape has radically changed because of the reform and its reshaping of the Chinese social divisions and the resulting emerging social inequalities (Liu, 2020).

In this process, how social divisions and stratifications should be defined and how they have been reshaped has attracted a wide range of scholars' attention. Goodman (2008) specifically conceptualises the emerging 'middle class', who have benefited from the socio-economic reform, as members of 'the new rich'—those in new occupations and professions who have benefited from the state legacy with more social and cultural resources. Goodman (2008) and Jacka (2009) both suggest that Chinese society, since the Reform, has been moving towards a more static class system that protects the new rich with 'value' (*jiazh*i, 价值). For Goodman (2008), this 'value' is elaborated through different understandings and behaviours, while for Cucco (2008), it refers to the economic and political resources that individuals own and have access to. Such value can be decided by property ownership (Goodman, 2008), political power, primarily Communist Party membership (Appleton et al., 2009), educational attainment (Croll, 2006; Liu and Erwin, 2015), (well-paid) occupations (Li, 2013a) and consumerism behaviours referring to 'producing value through their practices of consumption' (Tomba and Tang 2008, p.172). Considering the population mobility between rural and urban China, Smith and Pun (2018) categorised an additional ‘new working class’, referring to rural migrants mobilising to urban areas to reveal their impacts on shaping the labour movement in contemporary China.

In comparative scholarship, Wu and Treiman’s (2007) empirical evidence shows that the classification system in Western countries overlooks the Chinese household registration system and the rural-urban divide as two important layers of the Chinese socialist institutions. To capture Chinese socialist institutions dynamics, Lin and Wu (2009) take the Chinese household registration system, the work unit system and the distinction of cadres and workers into account and develop a Chinese social class structure that refers to a hierarchy of positions and the intersection of different forms of social stratification. Drawn on these ongoing debates, Liu (2020) further argues that in contemporary China, it is the bureaucratic and market coordination that defines Chinese social divisions. These divisions consist of a bureaucratic relation and a market relation, and these relations interact with each other in deciding the economic distribution and reshaping income disparity in post-reform China (Wu, 2019).

These debates have highlighted the complexity and multidimensionality of Chinese socioeconomic and institutional transitions in which social inequality and divisions are potentially manifested through different forms of productive assets, including household registration, political power, skills, and economic capital, under the increasing exposure of the market. The economic reform has allowed rural residents to mobilise to the cities, but the Chinese welfare system has not been comprehensively transformed into a more equal one (Zhu and Walker, 2018). Instead, Deng Xiaoping proposed the strategic policy of maintaining these social disparities: some people and regions receiving extra government resources would become rich before helping others later (Chinese Communist Party Congress 1984). This illustrates why there is limited assistance for people in need and a divided welfare system between rural and urban China. With more working and economic opportunities, these regions are centred on special economic zones and accessible trading areas in urban areas and coastal provinces. The urban welfare system also generally covers a broader range of social services than the rural welfare system (see also section 2.1.2; Chen, 2004; Jacka and Sargeson, 2011; Song, 2017). The remaining household registration system intentionally regulates people's eligibility for various working opportunities and welfare provisions based on their rural and urban residency status (also called agricultural or non-agricultural residency; Ngok and Huang, 2014). Criticised as 'a two-class society of making', it continually reinforces an extra layer of the institutionalised divide with unequally distributed resources and life chances between the two (Liu, 2020).

At the expense of rural residents and domestic migrants living in cities, these economic strategies and the welfare system reinforce the rural–urban divide and regional disparity, such that socio-economic transitions and developments have taken different forms in cities and villages (Anagnost, 2008; Guo et al., 2009; Long et al., 2010). For instance, in some cities, the tertiary sector occupies more than 70% of all jobs. Meanwhile, the agricultural industry is still the dominant income source in some villages (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2022). Therefore, from a spatial perspective, recognising the rural–urban divide and variations as important institutional dynamics can better clarify how the modernisation process affects women in different locations (Stockemer and Sundström, 2016).

Whilst from a temporal perspective, the rural–urban divide has evolved over time instead of remaining static. Over the past two decades, more researchers have challenged a rurality discourse that emphasises the rural–urban dichotomy and the stigmatisation of rurality (Murphy, 2003; Song, 2017; Chen et al., 2018). The agricultural economy in rural China has experienced significant changes, shifting from a collective farming structure to a more individualised and diverse economic design with rural and township enterprises (Song, 2017). Rural industrialisation features the emerging private sector, decentralised village business and an off-farm labour force that is free from collective communes (Pan, 2017). In the mid-2000s, the state proposed the construction of 'New Socialist Villages' (*shehui zhuyi xinnongcun*, 社会主义新农村), aiming to promote agricultural modernisation, increase the provisions of social welfares and primary education, and develop more job opportunities in villages (State Council 2006; Ahlers and Schubert 2009). This new policy initiative attempted to narrow the rural–urban welfare gap by implementing New Cooperative Medical Insurance in 2003, minimum living support in 2004 and a rural pension scheme in 2009. Song (2017) argues that restructuring the rural economy, which by necessity includes the collapse of the collaborative economy and the rise of private sectors in rural China, has gradually narrowed the rural–urban gap, at least from an economic perspective.

Although there has been significant progress in economics and a more comprehensive welfare system emerging in rural China, increasing studies show more evidence of rural–urban gaps, particularly in terms of the intersection of residency and public welfare entitlement (Yi and Liu, 2004; Wu and Wallace, 2021) and the gender income gap (Sicular et al., 2008). The urban–rural income ratio declined from 3.09 in 2002 to 2.62 in 2020, while urban income levels were still 2.55 times higher than rural ones (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020a). Regarding welfare benefits, Yi and Liu (2004) have researched medical costs among rural households and found that up to 90% of these costs are ‘out-of-pocket’ expenses without support from any medical insurance scheme. Li and Sicular (2014) also calculate the disguised welfare benefits for urban residents, revealing the growing household income gaps hidden beyond wage incomes and living costs in cities and villages. These benefits include public housing,[15] medical, educational and unemployment subsidies,[16] which all contribute extra income for urban residents.

Based on the Chinese General Social Survey conducted between 2008 and 2015, Wu and Wallace (2021) explore the importance of social stratification, household registration *and* educational attainment in terms of effects on earnings. Their findings show that both household registration and social divisions are equally important in determining one’s earnings. However, within the same regions, the household registration system is often the most influential factor that worsens the inequalities via unequally distributed welfare subsidies and better working opportunities. These scholars enhance the discussions about the different forms of regional disparities and offer an insightful spatial context in which rural and urban women’s everyday experiences are profoundly affected.

Under the intersection of gender and rural–urban divide, Liu et al. (2016) calculate data from three consecutive national surveys on Chinese women’s social status and show that the gender income disparity grew consistently larger between 1990 and 2010. The average income of urban women was 77.5% of that of their male counterparts in the 1990s, but it showed a nearly 10% decline by 2010, when it was found to be 67.3%. In rural China, the same indicator was 79% in the 1990s, while experiencing a sharp decrease to 56% in 2010. The income gap between women and men was becoming more pronounced in rural China. Based on China Household Income Survey data from between 2002 and 2013, Ma (2016) compared the wage discrimination between women and men. After controlling for other demographic variables, Ma (2016) finds that although there is persistent wage discrimination against women, such discrimination has diminished for urban women but not for rural domestic migrant women in cities.

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[15] This subsidy was mainly implemented among urban households after the economic reform and for those working in the public sector work units; see Wang (1999) for a review.

[16] Calculated from Chinese educational expenditures and numbers of students across regions.

Due to the household registration system, though living and working in cities, domestic migrants moving from rural to urban areas mostly cannot enjoy the urban welfare provisions as the urban locals do. There are two main groups of rural domestic migrants in cities: *regular residents* are those with similar welfare entitlement as urban locals, whereas *temporary residents* are those without residency rights or social security guarantees. As the majority of the rural domestic migrants, temporary residents are recognised as the ‘floating population’ (*liudong renkou*, 流动人口, or mobilising population) (Goodkind and West, 2002). In 2020, the floating population comprised 376 million people, comprising 26% of the Chinese population, with a nearly 70% increase over the previous ten years (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020b). In 2017, among these temporary migrants working in urban China, only around 35% of them had a formal employment contract, and around 17% to 22% of the floating population were enrolled in the Employee Five Social Insurance for formal employees (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, 2017).

Rural migrant women in cities have experienced intersecting segregation and gender discrimination affected by their residency identity when working in the urban labour market. Compared with local female workers in urban China, they are more likely to work in low-paying, low-skilled jobs with no social security coverage, including in the manufacturing and services industries (e.g., restaurants and domestic work; National Bureau of Statistics of China 2020). In a recent study, Qin et al. (2016) found that rural household registration was closely linked to a 16% salary reduction for female migrant employees in cities compared with local urban female employees. Using the self-employment sector as a case study, Ma and Deng (2016) suggest that migrants face more institutional barriers and financial pressure to access equal education resources for their children with rural residency. Thus, such unequally distributed welfare and resources have been extended to the next generations of these migrants.

The household registration system interacts with other emerging stratification systems in post-reform China, configuring multi-dimensional and multi-layer inequalities among individuals affected by the intersecting spatial stratification, rural and urban residency in this thesis, and gender. These institutional dynamics are essential for any understanding of women’s lived experiences in the Chinese modernisation process. The implications of the Chinese socio-economic transition are evident not only between women and men but also between different groups of women with intersecting dynamics of household registration arrangement and institutional barriers to accessing social security, healthcare and educational resources. Moving the current debates one step forward, this study integrates the spatial perspective and explores the implications of the rural–urban divide for the everyday experiences of rural, urban and migrant women with children (see more on sampling strategy in Chapter 4, section 4.2). It also attempts to present women’s multifaceted and heterogeneous everyday lives manifested by these intersecting stratification dynamics in contemporary China.

2.2 Confucianism in contemporary China

2.2.1 Definition of Confucianism

In ancient China, Confucianism dominated society in formal and informal ways via law, regulations and social norms. Confucius (551–479 BCE) constructed and spread Confucianism as a life philosophy, governance paradigm and religion. During the Han dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD), it became the state ideology, ritual and cultural system by which to legislate and regulate moral standards through the government’s interventions in people’s everyday practices (Chen, 2009; Bell, 2010). Confucian traditions had ‘Three Fundamental Bonds and Five Constant Virtues’ (*sangang wuchang*, 三纲五常) (Du, 2016). The three fundamental bonds refer to those of the civil servant and the emperor (ruler), the son and the father, and the wife and the husband. The five constant virtues are benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trust (*ren*, 仁; *yi*, 义; *li*, 礼; *zhi*, 智; *xin*, 信) (Zhang, 2013). These Confucian traditions compel individuals to follow moral virtues and adhere to the established hierarchy in interpersonal relations, including conjugal, intergenerational and social ties; the aim is to 'maintain the order of the state and society' (Yao 2000).

Neo-Confucianism (*Song Ming lixue*, 宋明理学) began in the Tang dynasty (618 to 907 AD) and further developed in the Song dynasty (960 to 1279 AD); it attempted to articulate a more rational and secular form of Confucianism and to eliminate the elements of Buddhist and Taoist philosophy (Weiming, 1976; Fisher and Tu, 1994; Huang, 1999; Gvosdev and Zhou, 2000; Yao, 2000). In the early twentieth century, the May Fourth Movement,[17] later extended to an anti-traditions movement, attempted to move away from traditional intellectualism, particularly Confucian traditions, and mitigate the influence of the powerful political elites (Schwartz et al., 1972). In the early 1920s, many socialists, including the representative Chen Duxiu, criticised Confucianism as a tradition and backwardness that prevented Chinese modernisation and development (Schwarcz, 1986; Zarrow, 2005).

When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) also recognised Confucianism as a barrier and purveyor of out-of-date ideas, particularly during the Cultural Revolution[18] (1966–1976). With the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy in 1978, however, a number of scholars re-examined the complex and shifting role of Confucianism in articulating political and social narratives, elaborating on the ongoing but subtle debates about transforming Confucianism in the Chinese modernisation process (Makeham, 2003; Zhang, 2011). These debates explored the possibility of integrating Western values, including freedom and democracy, to respond to the Chinese modernisation process that was occurring both within and beyond mainland China (Tang, 1994; Yao, 2000).

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[17] A Chinese anti-imperialist and political movement started from student protests in Beijing on 4 May 1919.

[18] This is known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a political movement launched by Ma Zedong. The aim of this movement was to remove any elements related to capitalism and traditions, particularly Confucianism, to highlight the central role of Communism in governing the Chinese society (Zuo 1991).

In the early 2000s, the CCP proactively reconfigured Confucian traditions. It strategically adopted the Confucian values of 'harmony' in the social and family order as an element of 'moral ethics' (Wang and Fan 2019). More specifically, the Chinese government proposed the concept of a 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui*, 和谐社会) to respond to the emerging social disparity and conflicts in the Chinese modernisation process. This concept can date back to the time of Confucius in describing a society of great unity (*datong*, 大同), referring to everyone and everything being at peace (see more discussions in section 2.3.2; Chen, 2011). The state has tried to shift its government philosophy from supporting an economics-oriented to a more balanced and sustainable society while also attempting to accommodate social policy reform to address emerging social risks and instability (see sub-section 2.1.2 and Table 2.1 above). As Rošker (2015) summarises, Confucianism is not always static or differentiated from the past. It can and has transformed into different modern ideologies selectively and evolutionally; alternatively, it can return to traditions under authoritarian governance. Therefore, it is vital to examine how the state power interacts with the market and how transforming Confucianism as an influential social dynamic manifests in women's everyday lives in the Chinese modernisation process.

2.2.2 Retreat and return as cultures and policy paradigms

Confucianism is not only perceived and practised from cultural and philosophical perspectives, as discussed in the last sub-section, but is also debated as a policy paradigm when comparing East Asian welfare systems. In the early phase of theorising the East Asian welfare system, the debates use a cultural–historical approach to highlight the importance of Confucianism as a potential welfare paradigm in shaping policy and practices: as 'Confucian welfare states' (Jones, 1993; Sung, 2003). Jones (1993) recognised the 'household'– and '(extended) family'–based features of Confucian traditions and emphasised the family's role as a welfare provider as regards finance, care and other forms of formal and informal support. From the cultural–historical perspective, Confucian values are seen as a rationale for the welfare system that features a low level of government intervention, modest welfare provision and the importance of family. Apart from this cultural-historical perspective, Johnson (1995) propounded the concept of a ‘developmental state’ that prioritises economic development with subordinated welfare policies to compare East Asian welfare systems. Holliday (2000) also argues that instead of Confucianism as a similar cultural foundation, economic growth fundamentally shapes welfare policies within the productivist paradigm in these societies, including Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. In recent debates, research shows evidence and tends to agree that the family-based welfare system in East Asia, though with variations, is primarily driven by and mainly serves economic development and the market (Walker and Wong, 2005; Lee and Ku, 2007; Powell and Barrientos, 2011).

Yue and Chan (2016) find a remarkable similarity in adult care services between urban China and other European societies: a rapidly developing market providing private services. Based on the data from ageing profile statistics, policy documents and ethnographic fieldwork, Fisher et al. (2018) also suggest that Confucianism cannot explain the marketisation of aged care services; economic development and globalisation are more important in affecting service provisions and structures in adult care. In a recent study, Zhang (2022) investigated the experiment–based marketisation process in regard to care for older people in Shanghai. Zhang’s (2022) empirical data shows that efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability are influential principles for policy processes and practices relating to the ageing population. Researchers working on this topic tend to argue that rather than Confucianism, family transformation and economic growth account for the changes in welfare and social services provisions, at least in relation to adult care in urban China. These contemporary debates inform the potential characteristics of welfare provision in Chinese society—namely, the importance of the family as a welfare provider and the prioritisation of economic growth.

The importance of the family as part of Confucian traditions is also discussed and connected to another important concept: familism. Highlighting the ideology of prioritising family over individuals, it is also specifically used to advocate for the family, instead of the state, taking responsibility for caring for family members (Ochiai, 2000; Ochiai and Hosoya, 2014). As a concept that is emerging to address care and the relationship between the family and the state, familism is often associated with gendered relations and traditions whereby women disproportionately share care responsibilities for dependent children and older family members (Lister, 1994; Leitner, 2003; Estévez-Abe et al., 2016; Le Bihan et al., 2019). Pfau-Effinger (2005) points out that familism is rooted in 'care cultures', which are closely linked to specific cultural and social contexts. In connection to the existing welfare debates, a wide range of scholars have further argued that a familistic welfare state, as a system that has limited state provision or market-based choices to share unpaid care within the family, manifests not only in East Asian societies with Confucian traditions, where it is considered a moral and cultural doctrine, but also in Italy and Spain, where Catholicism is a predominant religion (Saraceno and Keck, 2010; Saraceno and Keck, 2011; Estévez-Abe et al., 2016; Ferrera, 2016; Saraceno, 2016).

Drawing on these discussions, prevalent studies have investigated the connections, similarities, and differences between these countries that are generally identified as 'familistic welfare states' (Tavora 2012; León and Pavolini 2014; Estévez-Abe et al. 2016; Saraceno 2016). By comparing Spain and Italy, Japan and South Korea, Saraceno (2016) articulated the concepts of familism and revealed how these countries differ not only in the degree of (de)familisation but also in the specific familistic form due to their profiles. This research identifies different familistic profiles, (i) familism by default, where the state assumes that the family is the welfare provider and provides no (or limited) support, (ii) supported familism where the state supports and recognises the family as a welfare provider with financial help, leave or other forms of institutional resources, (iii) prescribed familism where the civil law prescribes financial or care obligations within the kinship network, and (iv) defamilisation where the state or the market shares care and financial responsibilities with family members in different forms. Even though these four countries are often recognised as familistic welfare regimes, their familistic/defamilisation profiles, government policies in terms of care-related leave, and labour market participation are varied and even moving in different directions to address the emerging issues of an ageing population, a declining fertility rate and female labour market participation. As Saraceno (2016) argues, the manifestation of familism is not only shaped by cultures and religions, but is also challenged and sustained by institutional, political and economic properties that intentionally place the family at the centre of sharing care and financial obligations. It is therefore important not to attribute the familistic features of the Chinese welfare system to Confucianism traditions or simply use familism to categorise these familistic welfare systems, which may overlook the contextual depth and nuanced dynamics of these transitory welfare systems.

This study intends to contextualise the transforming Confucianism and its implications for the Chinese welfare system, which correspond to the economic and political needs in the modernisation process. To further the discussions about Confucianism's nuanced and dynamic manifestation in contemporary China, it also explores and distinguishes the interaction and impact of Confucianism at a micro level, on individuals and their families, and at a macro-level, on state-led narratives and public welfare provisions. These multi-scalar perspectives are integrated to develop the human dignity approach that is applied in this study. Transforming Confucianism is included as an important intersecting and analytical layer in investigating and comparing women's experiences (see Chapter 3, section 3.3). Additionally, secondary and empirical data have been collected to incorporate these macro and micro perspectives (see Chapter 4). The following sub-section reviews and connects the literature and context regarding how Confucianism is manifested in gender and intergenerational interactions that are most relevant to women in contemporary China: filial piety, son preference, patriarchy, patrilineality and patrilocality.

2.2.3 Transforming Confucianism and patriarchy in the family

Confucian traditions have been widely discussed in the East Asian context and are regarded as a convention of patriarchal domination in different social milieus (Tsai, 2006; Koh, 2008; Bell, 2010). In the West, the mainstream discussion of patriarchy recognises the power of men over women (Walby, 1989a). Walby (1989b) defines patriarchy as social structures, mechanisms and everyday practices in which men exploit women. Such exploitation can be enacted through a patriarchal model of production, patriarchal relations in the paid workspace, state- and male-sanctioned violence against women, the representation of sexuality, and the way in which cultural institutions are supported by religion and by their portrayal in the media (Walby, 1989b). In particular, exploitation involving the state and cultural institutions under the interaction between public and private spheres is further discussed in sub-section 2.3.2. This sub-section focuses on the interaction between gender and intergenerational relations that shape the Chinese patriarchy practised within the family.

In the Chinese context, patriarchal dynamics in the Confucian traditions feature the interaction between gender and age seniority, involving the power oppression directed from the old and the male to the young and female (Shen, 2009; Sun, 2017).

Chinese family practices often cover the intergenerational interactions among older parents, adult children and dependents beyond the interaction between the couple and the nuclear family. Filial piety, recognised as a patriarchal practice within the family, has always been pivotal to understanding the intersection between intergenerational and gender order in the Chinese family (Zhan and Rhonda, 2003; Shi, 2009; Chou, 2011; Sun, 2017; Zhang, 2017). As part of well-entrenched Confucian values, filial piety refers to the explicit rules that regulate the young generations' roles and responsibilities to respect and support the older generation (Ikels, 2004). Moreover, these intergenerational interactions are mostly patrilineal, focusing on the male partner's extended family (Sung and Pascall, 2014).

Patrilineality and patrilocality are two critical traditions that relate to the practice of filial piety. *Patrilineality* is concerned with continuing the patriline of the male family members over generations. In traditional Confucianism, social reproduction recognises only the male side—that is, the son and the husband. The son also has a symbolic meaning in maintaining the family and surname (Das Gupta et al., 2003). Additional patrilineal practices are reinforced via the family business succession (Xian et al. 2021); this is institutionalised by agricultural land inheritance and further wealth accumulation, which are primarily limited to the male (Eskelinen, 2022). *Patrilocality* refers to the gender order in living arrangements, whereby the husband and his wife normally live near the paternal families to provide daily care and financial support for the husband's parents (Gruijters and Ermisch, 2019). Owing to patrilocal residency, daughters are expected to care for their parents-in-law rather than their natal parents (Liu, 2017). Compared to their male siblings, this traditional patrilocal living pattern reinforces the daughters' secondary role in fulfilling filial piety for their parents (Shi 2009).

More scholars have questioned the practicality of fulfilling filial piety with these two patriarchal traditions in the Chinese modernisation process (Yan, 2016; Eklund, 2018; Ta et al., 2019). As discussed in sub-sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3, maintaining frequent physical contact and sustained intergenerational co-residence is constrained by geographic intimacy that has been weakened by population mobility and rapid urbanisation. As a result, intergenerational co-residence in a big family is not as widespread an issue as previously. For example, focusing on migrant women, Shen et al. (2016) clarify that there has been renegotiation in filial piety practices, including a shift from providing care to financial support, to address the geographical distance due to mobility across locations. The proportion of 'one-generation households', referring to the household in which a person lives alone, with others in the same generation (e.g., friends) or with a partner as a couple without children, has grown to an average of more than 50% of all Chinese households (Chinese Statistical Yearbook 2021). This has led some scholars (Shen, 2007; Cheung and Kwan, 2009; Eklund, 2018) to claim that the reduced physical care provision or intergenerational co-residence represents the erosion and collapse of filial piety in urban China.

With a focus on urban China, Meng (2007) studies how older generations have benefited from the privatisation of the housing market and economic growth with increasing housing prices. This process has made them more financially independent of their adult children in old age than was traditionally the case. In contrast, with rising housing prices and living costs, adult children are more financially dependent on their older parents (Zhu, 2012). Yan (2016) also suggests that there is 'descending familism' in contemporary China, which features younger generations' dependence on the older generation for childcare and financial support. From a life discourse perspective, Qi (2018) and Sun (2017) find that intergenerational interaction becomes more reciprocal and that parents are more willing to provide financial support for their only child—even if that child is a daughter—in exchange for old-age support from their adult children in the future. According to previous studies, there is a shift in how family support is shared across generations, which reveals the transitions in the importance of family resources from the young generations in the past and nowadays from the old generations.

Regarding international studies, Lee (2005) argues that despite an increasing proportion of nuclear families in South Korea, having resources exchanged with extended families is still prevalent, although not necessarily through physical contact. Wu (2014) also identifies a similar pattern in Taiwanese society. These studies suggest a continued belief in the importance of family as a core value from Confucianism; however, people might practise this family solidarity equally across generations. It is not limited to filial piety or subordination to the older generations. Informed by contemporary research, this study recognises the importance and the transitions of intergenerational dynamics, which hopes to broaden the discussions about these complex intergenerational interactions in shaping women's everyday experiences.

Although there is fading age seniority in intergenerational relations, as contemporary research argues, women's experiences in contemporary China are still often shaped by the interaction of gender and intergenerational relations (Cui et al., 2019; Deng et al., 2019). In a recent study, Yu and Cheng (2021) reveal that in addition to the gender earnings gap in the labour market, wealth disproportionately transferred to sons results in a significant gender asset gap, further contributing to total income and wealth gaps between women and men throughout generations. These gaps between sons and daughters manifest through property inheritance (Kennett and Chan, 2011) and land distribution, particularly in rural China (Li and Wu, 2011; Sargeson, 2012). The financial resources transfer within the family, particularly in terms of property, is still gendered and features son preference, highlighting the important analytical layer, gender and intergenerational interactions, in understanding the penetration of Confucian traditions and its manifestation in contemporary China.

Contemporary research and debates have focused on the implications of economic and structural transitions on the decreasing importance of patrilineality and patrilocality and the weakening of the age seniority imposed on women. There is a widely held view that moving away from extended family can mean less intervention from the older generations. However, the absence of childcare and housework support primarily provided by the older generations can also leave a care gap for families, particularly women, with limited access to other forms of support. Beyond family practices, this research also discusses gender dynamics in the workplace and broader civil society in relation to interactions between the market, state and individuals. In the context of the potential retreating patriarchy in the intergenerational axis in the family, how patriarchal practices in the gender axis have been affected and transformed in the wider social context is further discussed in the following section 2.3.

2.3 Gender and Confucianism in the Chinese modernisation process

2.3.1 The state, market and gender roles

In the period 1949–1976, or Mao's era, the first-wave appeal of 'women can hold up half the sky' as a form of state feminism, and generous welfare provisions significantly promoted full female labour market participation and suppressed Confucian gender norms in the public sphere (Zheng, 2005; Ji et al., 2017). Traditionally, women were expected to enter arranged marriages, dedicatedly give birth to sons and serve their husbands and parents-in-law as obedient wives and daughters-in-law (Song, 2011; Song, 2012). The image of a 'new socialist woman' and 'the liberation of women' with the capability and opportunity to paid work challenged the traditional figure of the woman as a full-time homemaker as defined by Confucian traditions. These state-led reform narratives set up the universal standard for gender equality: women can work as men in the labour market. However, this state-led gender equality was embedded in individual obligation and national commitment.

As Song (2012) and Zuo (2013) argue, unlike Western feminism focusing on individual rights, Chinese gender equality is a 'state-monitored' and 'state-controlled' discourse, emerging at the cost of women's self-determination to pursue different lifestyles. Although the dominant Marxist discourse outwardly suppressed Confucian traditions in the public sphere from the 1950s to the 1980s, gendered roles and patriarchal practices continued to dominate the private family sphere (Whyte and Parish, 1984; Brownell and Wasserstrom, 2002). This process merely created symbolically and primarily imagined gender equality under the Communist narrative (Nee, 2000). As Wu (2009) points out, these national narratives and practices imposed by the state fail to comprehensively remove the traditional gendered division of labour at home or shift towards recognising equal importance between paid work and unpaid housework in the long term.

After the Reform in the 1980s, the 'iron rice bowl' (tie fanwan, 铁饭碗), referring to being employed in work units with a modest while stable income and a guaranteed form of lifelong public welfare, has been significantly eroded and erased by the retreat of the state and the free play of market mechanism in the privatisation process (also see sub-section 2.1.2). A wide range of studies points to a transition from stable employment and full access to the public welfare to decreasing security and emerging precarity in women's employment experiences during the early economic reform periods (Solinger, 2002; Wu and Frazier, 2018). In the 1980s, the state's call about 'women returning home' highlighted gender essentialism (Wang, 1997; Song, 2011). This call reinforced the perceptions of women as 'inferior and weaker labourers' by highlighting women's reproduction and household duties in the context of layoff waves and economic restructuring in early reform periods. Therefore, it has rejuvenated the patriarchal tradition of the male breadwinner and female home-maker and made the connection to the market discourse in Chinese modernisation, which also justifies the gender imbalance of higher female layoff rates under the state's narratives (Ji et al., 2017).

As a result, the state reconfigured a woman's role from an 'iron woman' actively participating in the labour market to a 'good wife' and 'good mother' looking after the family. Song (2011) argues that this state-driven narrative has potentially reinforced the gender-essentialist ideologies that position women primarily as care providers and then as a productive labour force. This narrative appeared alongside a gender-skewed wave of employment lay-offs (more than 60% of employees laid off were women) and redundancies in the public sector and private industries in urban China (Liu, 2007a; Yang, 2007; Wang and Klugman, 2020). In this case, the reinforced gendered roles and rejuvenated patriarchal traditions emerged and became more evident alongside more uncertainties during the economic transition.

On the one hand, these increasing gender inequalities were more significant in the service industry, such as the retail and hotel sectors (Otis, 2011). Scholars also recognise this as transitioning from an 'iron rice bowl' to a 'bowl of rice for the youth' (*qingchun fan*, 青春饭) (Zhang, 2000; Price and Fang, 2002; Wang, 2002; Hanser, 2005). As Liu (2007b) observed, middle-aged women were more disadvantaged in the lay-off wave and worsened gender discrimination than were their younger female cohorts. On the other hand, particularly in urban China, there is an emerging narrative of 'modernised women', referring to capable, independent and intelligent women in the 2000s (Liu, 2017). These shifting modernising identities have emphasised women's autonomy to proactively respond to emerging economic opportunities and fight against the rejuvenated patriarchal traditions in post-reform China (Ji et al., 2017; Eklund, 2018).

In policy documents and media narratives, ‘her power’ (*ta liliang,* 她力量) (Li, 2013c; People's Daily Reporter, 2014; Lin, 2015) emerged in the 2010s, referring to more women playing important roles in different occupations and demonstrating women’s power and capabilities in the public sphere. ‘Her power’—which aims to motivate women’s contribution to the national economy and public engagement—highlights women’s social value and contribution via paid work, devotion to the community and help with addressing the broader social issues. These narratives and terms have encouraged women to recognise their unique value and autonomy outside the family to fulfil the standard of being a modern woman under the state’s influence (Lin, 2018). As women's economic and social status has increased, another relevant term, ‘her economics’ (*ta jingji*, 她经济), also emerges, addressing the economic circle and phenomenon that has formed around women's needs, financial management and consumption.

The gender ideology in fulfilling motherhood and parenting practices was also reshaped by the interaction between the state and the market. A number of studies discuss the emerging national discourse of ‘quality education’ (*suzhi jiaoyu*, 素质教育) that suggests the single child in the family shall be raised and educated with quality educational resources and adequate parenting time and energy. These studies explore parenting practices among only-child families in modernised China, particularly in urban areas (Fong, 2002; Fong, 2004; Goodman, 2014; Mu and Xie, 2016; Zhang et al., 2020). For instance, Fong (2004) argues for the increasing narratives and practices of intensive motherhood in raising these urban singletons with extra care and time and more investment in better educational resources. The government narrative, as evident in official documents referring to ‘good mothers’,—recognised those devoted to supporting and educating their children as having a competitive talent, and a quality younger generation arising from such parenting practices has often been constructed and promoted as part of the national morality (Jin and Yang, 2015; Kuan, 2015; Hanser and Li, 2017).

The narrative and practices of the ‘good mother’, ‘quality education’, and ‘scientific parenting’ in gender roles intersect with social class and spatial variations. Contemporary research discussed above mainly defines these narratives in the context of a competitive labour market and middle-class families in urban China. As discussed in Section 2.1, the uneven modernisation process in rural and urban China did not benefit people from different locations in the same way. Anagnost (2004) and Goodman (2014) critically point out that the ‘quality’ (*suzhi*, 素质) of individuals is closely connected to the middle class and those living in urban China, where people have sufficient financial resources and access to developed private educational services. In a recent study by Liu and Erwin (2015), interviews and observations with locals and migrant women demonstrate that these good mother narratives and practices potentially reinforce social disparities and generate a greater divide between rural and urban residents and the rich and the poor in fulfilling these gender expectations. They find that rural women and migrants have fewer financial resources, stable parenting relations, and cultural capital to invest in education for their children, which deprives them of fulfilling the socially expected ‘good mother’ role.

Closely related to women’s mother role, the motherhood penalty is frequently discussed to explain the manifestations of the interaction of the market and gendered role through the gender pay gap (Hartmann, 1976; Shu, 2005; Li and Dong, 2011), occupational segregation (Shu and Bian, 2003; He and Wu, 2017) and career developments (Zhang et al., 2008; Mu and Xie, 2016). There are different explanations for how and why mothers have experienced more earning gaps and discrimination in the market. The main explanation highlighted the human capital theory that mothers have less time and energy to develop their job skills and productivity and accumulate work experience (Becker, 1985). An alternative explanation is ‘compensating differentials’, which refers to low-income jobs having potential advantages in time flexibility, fewer qualifications and skills requirements (Smith, 1979). As England (2005) later argues, these advantages recognised as being ‘family(mother)-friendly’ are more compatible with mothers’ multiple roles and care responsibilities. In terms of gender identity, more studies suggest that the employer might hold the motherhood stereotypes associated with frequent distractions by care responsibilities, the gendered proportion of sharing care work, and low efficiency (King, 2008; Cheung et al., 2022).

The research discussed above examines the nature of the transitioning gender ideology, with women holding up half the sky during Mao’s era, women returning home in the early reform period, and paradoxical messages regarding the empowerment of ‘her power’ and ‘good mother role’ in the present day (also see summary in Table 2.2). Complex social and economic transitions have potentially reshaped the gender ideology, leading to an uneasy co-existence of revived patriarchal traditions and emerging female empowerment in post-reform China (Fong, 2002; Liu, 2017; Wang and Feng, 2021). In addition, interactions between state-led intervention in one’s personal life and the marketisation process provide a complicated socio-economic context for women with children to practise their personal choices when fulfilling multiple roles and responsibilities. This study attempts to capture the complex and nuanced layers of everyday experiences and the reconfigured gender roles that the state and the market have profoundly reshaped. More importantly, by researching women‘s experiences in their specific contexts, this study addresses how women respond to and interact with these gender roles and how these responses and understandings vary for women from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Table 2.2 Timeline and Corresponding Political Narratives

Timeframe	**Key slogans and narratives**
Pre-reform period 1949-1976	• “Women can hold up half the sky” • “Iron women and iron girls” • “New socialist woman”
Post-reform periods	
1978-1992 (The earlier stage of reform)	• “Women returning home” • “Women at home and men at work as virtues” • “Good mother, good wife”
1993-2005 (Jiang Zemin’s era)	• “Good mother, good wife” • “Quality education”
2005-2012 Hu Jintao’s era	• “Harmonious family and society” • “Scientific Outlook on Development” • “Quality education”
2012-present Xi Jinping’s era	• Core socialist values: National level: prosperity, democracy, civility and harmony; Societal level: freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law; Individual level: patriotism, dedication, integrity, and kindness • “Her power” and “Her economics”

2.3.2 Public patriarchy and state-led Confucianism

The previous sub-section discussed transforming Confucianism at the individual and micro levels with a particular focus on family. The literature reviewed in the present sub-section takes a macro perspective in a broader social context to discuss the public patriarchy and the influence of the state in how transforming Confucianism is shaped and its implications on women and their families. Walby (1989b) recognises the power relations generated and affected by the gendered power outside the family as 'public patriarchy' (94) that can be market-based (USA), state-based (Eastern Europe) or a mixture of the state and market (Western Europe). More specifically, public patriarchy is the product of gender inequality based on the subordination and segregation of women in the market, the state and other cultural institutions, whereas 'private patriarchy' refers to the system that exploits women in the private sphere and excludes women from the public sphere (Walby, 1997). Walby (2011) later argues that Western societies have largely shifted from private patriarchy to public patriarchy, which further disadvantages women within and beyond the family. In the Chinese context, emerging literature also explores the shifting patriarchy under the interaction between the modernisation process and transforming Confucianism (Santos and Harrell, 2017). This sub-section discusses and connects the existing literature researching the shifting patriarchy, particularly state-based patriarchy, which is relevant to transforming Confucianism and how it is integrated into individual-family-state relations in Chinese modernisation.

In the past two decades, Confucianism has been transformed through policy narratives and practices that reconfigure the relationship between the individual, the family, the state, and the market. As discussed in sub-section 2.2.1, in the early 2000s, the state used the concept of 'harmony' in Confucianism to reshape the family and the broader social order. In so doing, it aimed to construct a harmonious socialist society and harmonious families under the supervision and regulations of the Chinese Communist Party. The state then repackaged this Confucian tradition and defined harmony as good family relations, acceptance of the existing social orders and the de-escalation of conflicts in interpersonal relations (Guo and Guo, 2008; Cook and Dong, 2011; Li, 2017). The state amplifies the values of family and connects these values to the deeply embedded Confucian traditions to facilitate public acceptance. Specifically, to maintain a harmonious marriage and family, women were expected to complete household duties and maintain peaceful in-law relationships, which may have perpetuated the gendered division of labour and the hierarchical divisions in the family. Chan (2008) points out that the policy goal and political narrative of constructing a harmonious family and society aim to promote submission and obedience rather than equal intergenerational, gender and interpersonal relationships. Through interviews with women, Lee (2018b) finds that harmony as a social norm was often interpreted as conformity and the silencing of conflicts, which resulted in more forms of oppression of women and gender inequalities across families and workplaces. As Ji et al. (2017) argue, Chinese traditions never separated the public sphere from the private sphere. Instead, public patriarchy has constantly penetrated the gender order from the public sphere into different aspects of everyday life.

In Xi Jinping's[19] era (2012–present), there are 12 core socialist values at the national, social and individual levels (see Table 2.2 above). This new set of socialist ideologies redefines personal responsibility by prioritising national and societal needs. As defined by Confucian traditions, 'citizen' (*min*, 民), also referred to as 'a member of society', is expected to serve the country and society as morally well-behaved individuals, suggested in state documents and congress meetings (State Council of China 2016). Gow (2017) compares these key concepts and posters used in the socialist values campaign, which shows that the three critical Confucian concepts of benevolence, righteousness and filial piety are integrated into the socialist values by highlighting individual responsibility, social harmony, and national development. As Walker and Wong (2005) have previously argued, Confucianism was constantly reconstructed in the name of cultural and philosophical development as part of the political ideology to justify the expansion of individual and family responsibilities towards the state's development. These top-down narratives about personal virtues and moral ethics strategically adopt entrenched Confucian values in the government's propaganda to align with people's familiar culture and values. By connecting harmony and state-defined 'citizen' with family and common social sense, these values reinforce a cultural, social and political demand to be a well-behaved 'member of society' to fulfil these morals.

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[19] The current president of the People's Republic of China since 2013.

Women have experienced more economic and social opportunities to pursue personal interests and financial independence in the market economy (Wang and Klugman, 2020). However, their experiences are embedded in these competing elements that simultaneously encourage women's independence with more opportunities and commitment to family and the country. This potentially constructs an uneasy co-existence of modernisation and tradition in women's everyday experiences. Xie (2021) researched urban middle-class women and finds that although women with more resources can achieve economic independence, their family ethics and the state-led social norms still affect their choices about family formation, childbirth and parenting. To recap, the intergenerational interaction in private patriarchal practices (see sub-section 2.2.3) and the state-led Confucian traditions in public patriarchal practices represent two important insights into Chinese patriarchal practices. These practices not only relate to the power dynamics between women and men, but also intersect with the attitudes of family members from different generations and with the relations between the state, family and individuals in wider society.

In contemporary China, Confucianism is closely linked to family, but it is not limited to debates concerning family issues. Whilst it is used to enhance social integration and cohesion by highlighting collective interests and mutual support in a wider social context. Responding to the discussions in section 2.2.2, familism that shares some similar specifications of individual-family relations with Confucian traditions could not comprehensively reveal or explore the complexity of Chinese modernisation and socioeconomic transitions concerned with multiple dimensions of everyday lives. It is therefore important not to understand Confucianism reduced to the discussions of familism and family dynamics but to locate transforming Confucianism in a broader social, economic and political perspective, interacting with Chinese modernisation. However, there are still different puzzles related to how the return of state-led and transforming Confucian traditions affects women's everyday experiences. It is also important to investigate how women respond to these reinforced state-led Confucian traditions in the context of increasing but unequally distributed choices and opportunities in contemporary China. To enhance these discussions, this study explores the transitions of different forms of public patriarchy and transforming Confucianism penetrating women's multi-dimensional everyday lives of well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination, and equal value.

2.3.3 Gender dynamics in the modernisation process

This section draws on the literature that conceptualises gender dynamics and the debates about the similarities and differences in the Chinese modernisation process compared with that of the West. As previous modernisation theories discussed, the transition from an agricultural to a post-industrial society often features the development of urbanisation and education rates, the decline of religion, welfare state development and an increasing tertiary sector(Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Stockemer and Sundström, 2016). This process is also recognised as closely connected to the development of gender equality (Phillips, 2018). These scholars argue that the more developed a society’s economy is, the more public perceptions and understandings about the similar roles of men and women become. Meanwhile, the implications of promoting gender equality are multifaceted, including declining fertility rates, increasing female participation in the labour market, rising female education rates, and the equal domestic division of labour (Giddens, 1992; Inglehart, 1997; Wilensky, 2002; Tanabe and Tokita-Tanabe, 2003; Beck and Grande, 2010). However, as Song (2017) argues, these primary characteristics have an independent impact on women, and different aspects of modernisation might simultaneously challenge and promote women’s development in various ways.

By focusing on the gender issues in contemporary China, an increasing number of scholars suggest that the commonly applied indicators in understanding gender equality fail to reflect the actual gender dynamics in a state-led market economy and under authoritarian governance (Ji, 2015; Zarafonetis, 2017; Ji and Wu, 2018). In Mao’s era (1949–1978), the state minimised the market penalty, whereby women usually took dual roles as care providers and breadwinners in a marketised economy. Most women working in work units had guaranteed lifelong social security, maternity welfare, public childcare services and pensions. In addition, the state centrally regulated both women’s and men’s salaries, which were not affected by pregnancy and childcare responsibilities (Meng, 2000). Jin (2006) argues that in pre-reform China (1949–1976), the CCP modelled its push for gender equality on Engel’s theory that the involvement of women in the industry is a prerequisite for women’s emancipation. Zuo and Jiang (2009) highlight how state policy was used as an instrument to protect and promote women’s equal rights, such as marriage rights, property rights and educational and employment opportunities. These were revolutionary changes compared with the situation in Imperial China. The system of work units and policies discussed above, coupled with the Chinese state's aggressive pursual of this policy, resulted in women's employment rates in China being among the highest globally (Attané, 2012). However, this overemphasis on labour market participation is also criticised for not being able to value unpaid care and marginalising women's multiple roles and responsibilities at home (Cook and Dong, 2011; Saraceno and Keck, 2011).

However, in the early economic reform periods, there was a large-scale lay-off of female employees to accelerate the marketisation of SOEs (Appleton et al., 2002). As a result, there was a significant decline in the employed female population, from 71.2% of working-age women employed in 1990 to 59% in 2021[20] (Gittings, 2006; Yan, 2010; World Bank, 2022). As Song (2012) and Zuo (2013) argue, the state's protection for female labour market participation was, and still is, primarily a response to the labour shortage and economic modernisation rather than an attempt to achieve gender equality as a modernisation agenda. Whilst the strictly implemented one-child policy, rather than entire personal choices affected by economic development, has played a role in the declining birth rates since the 1980s, from 1.82% to 0.75% in 2021 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2022). Existing studies have shown that, as the result of authoritarian governance and policy practices, the high female labour market participation rate and declining birth rate are insufficient to illustrate the practices of gender justice in women's everyday experiences (Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005; Jia and Yu, 2019; Cai, 2020). It is difficult to use modernisation theory from the West to coherently map out Chinese women's various and shifting situations under the interaction of the state's intervention and rapid marketisation.

These gender dynamics show that women's experiences in Chinese society cannot be rigidly separated at the individual, household, market or national levels. Instead, social, economic and institutional dynamics often interactively reshape women's experiences at home, in the market and in wider society. Women's everyday experiences are embedded in the interaction between the Chinese modernisation process and transforming Confucianism, which has shaped a complex and dynamic socio-economic context that can be distinguished from the Western modernisation agenda. Cheung and Kwan (2009) have summarised that the Chinese modernisation process is incomplete and patchy. Modernisation has not happened in all aspects: although the market and economy have been modernising, social norms and politics are not necessarily the case. Therefore, it is important to engage in a coherent and thorough exploration of women's everyday experiences from different dimensions instead of focusing on specific indicators or aspects alone. By applying and developing the human dignity approach (Chan and Bowpitt, 2005), this study focuses on women's physical and psychological well-being, care relations, self-determination, social integration and equal value in their everyday experiences.

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[20] The proportion of the female employed population aged 15 years and over, based on national estimations (World Bank 2022).

Conclusion

Chinese modernisation is a plural, multi-dimensional, uneven process with significant economic development and increasing social inequalities. The interaction between the state-led marketisation process, demographic transitions and shifting social norms in the Chinese modernisation process have shaped a complex and fluid context in which women's experiences are profoundly affected. In addition, Confucian traditions and transforming Confucianism are important social dynamics for understanding women's everyday experiences in contemporary China. Therefore, the impacts of modernisation and its interaction with transforming Confucianism in terms of women's daily experiences form the focus of this study. This chapter has brought together these nuanced and interlinked bodies of knowledge on modernisation, transforming Confucianism and gender.

Having established the complexity and multidimensionality of women's lived experiences in contemporary China, the next chapter will explore, contextualise, analyse and further extend the human dignity approach developed by Chan and Bowpitt in 2005. This approach will be utilised throughout the study, from shaping the research design to providing an integrated and multi-faceted framework to capture and analyse women's everyday experiences within the intersecting dynamics of the Chinese modernisation process and transforming Confucianism.

Chapter 3 The Human Dignity Approach

Introduction

This chapter critically discusses and develops the human dignity approach with a temporal, spatial and gender perspective. In an initial step, Chan and Bowpitt (2005) apply this approach to assess and compare the dignity of unemployed people and the implications of (un)employment policies in China, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Hong Kong. The initial human dignity approach (Chan and Bowpitt, 2005) captures the relational and culturally embedded dynamics in individual experiences of achieving autonomy and mutuality via coherent and interlinked dimensions, which are as follows: physical and psychological well-being, care duties, social integration, human learning, self-determination and equal value. Applied and developed in this study, this multi-dimensional and comprehensive approach, not only as an organising framework that looks into different dimensions, potentially offers a thorough and broad way to research and understand the everyday experiences of women with children living in a rapidly transitioning society. As the original approach was not specifically on women's experiences, this chapter further enhances this approach by developing these dimensions with a gender lens and intersecting and analytical layers, as discussed below. The chapter also elaborates on the connections between the human dignity approach and this study, as well as how this approach is composed, developed and revised to research women's everyday experiences in contemporary China.

Drawing on contemporary debates about gender justice and human dignity (Section 3.1), this research revises the initial framework developed by Chan and Bowpitt (2005) and integrates a gender perspective to enhance this approach to researching women's experiences (Section 3.2). Based on the initial human dignity approach, this study has five developed dimensions through which to capture women's experiences: physical and psychological well-being, care relations, self-determination, social integration and equal value. Informed by the existing literature and the Chinese socio-economic context, this study further develops Chan and Bowpitt's (2005) human dignity approach by explicitly addressing the interrelations between social, economic and institutional dynamics. These intersecting and analytical layers, including gender and intergenerational interaction, spatial variations and transforming Confucianism, intersect with the key dimensions mentioned above to reveal the contextual depth of women's similar and different experiences in rural and urban China (Section 3.3). As a critical foundation, this approach shaped and guided this study at different stages of research design to contribute to the contemporary debates.

3.1 Human dignity approach and gender justice

3.1.1 Contemporary approaches to assessing welfare and policies

This section discusses the contemporary debates on gender-focused approaches that have informed the development of the human dignity approach. It begins with several approaches, models and theories developed to assess the implications of socio-economic development and its implications of welfare provisions for individuals in the current debate. There are objective measurements that focus on economic-relevant indicators. For instance, GDP per capita and purchasing power parity, used to compare national economies and market value, are often recognised as essential indicators to measure and compare human well-being and quality of life, at least from an economic perspective. However, many scholars, including Cobb et al. (1995) and Phillips (2006), argue that such monetary measures and approaches neglect those conducting unpaid care and housework and engaging in community and volunteer activities that are not valued and measured as part of economic success in the market and the national accounting system. Other scholars, such as Talberth et al. (2007), try to address the pitfalls of these single measurements and propose other indicators, including the Genuine Progress Indicator, to incorporate additional, non-economic activities. With additional focus on education and health dimensions, UNDP (1990, 1995, 2010) also developed the Human and Gender Development Index, Gender Inequality Index and Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index as more holistic and well-articulated alternatives to measuring socio-economic development and its impact on individuals. Given this study's focus on women's perspective, it is vital to rigorously select and develop a holistic and comprehensive approach that can address unpaid household work and other social activities, which are rarely measured or recognised economically in previous single indicators and economic-based approaches.

Whilst in comparative scholarship, a wide range of research (Esping-Andersen, 1990; O'Connor, 1993; Esping-Andersen, 1999; O'Connor et al., 1999; Gough, 2000; Wood and

Gough, 2006) highlighting the dynamic relations between individuals, families, the market, and the state, has been developed to categorise welfare regimes and their impacts on individuals in different societies at the aggregate level. Esping-Andersen (1990: 23) developed the concept of decommodification, whereby 'citizens can freely, and without potential loss of job, income, or general welfare, opt-out of work when they consider it necessary', to measure and compare people's economic dependence on and independence from the labour market through generous or limited social security services. Decommodification occurs when individuals can maintain their livelihood without selling their labour as a commodity in the labour market (Esping-Andersen 1990). This fundamental concept in welfare typologies has been discussed, developed and criticised by a wide range of literature, but there is a general consensus that the conceptualisation of decommodification has overlooked the complexities of female employment influenced by family responsibilities (Sainsbury, 1996; Lewis, 1997; Orloff, 1997; Sainsbury, 1999; Lewis and Giullari, 2005). These scholars have further developed gender-focused approaches and moved the debates about gender and welfare regimes forward. In particular, they have investigated the implications of social reproduction and the gender division of labour reshaped by different patterns of welfare provisions (Korpi, 2000; Pfau-Effinger, 2005). Women's responsibilities and relations with their families are often the central concerns of these debates (Lister and Campling, 2003; Bambra, 2004; Daly and Scheiwe, 2010; Daly, 2011).

A series of scholars have suggested that the welfare regime typology should consider the family (Sainsbury, 1999; Lister, 2002; Lister, 2007; Saraceno and Keck, 2008; Saraceno and Keck, 2010). Defamilisation, referring to the degree to which individuals can fulfil care responsibilities and maintain financial autonomy without relying on family relations, emerged to address Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare typologies, which marginalise women's experiences in regard to unpaid household work (Lister, 1994; Bambra, 2007; Korpi, 2010; Lohmann and Zagel, 2016). This approach is concerned with women's autonomy in deciding their family relations and explores policy measures to support individuals to or not to perform certain roles in the family, e.g., being an informal care provider with a reasonable standard of living (Lister, 1994; Kröger, 2011). It also attempts to investigate finance, or care-focused, solutions to ease women's responsibilities in terms of unpaid care and remove their financial reliance on their families when their paid work is affected by unpaid care (Korpi, 2000; Bambra, 2007; Lohmann and Zagel, 2016).

Many scholars have also further developed these concepts to reveal the dynamic process of family-market-state relationship transformations. For example, in the context of neoliberalism and its impact on policymaking, a wide range of research shows empirical evidence concerning a process that is interconnected with defamilisation: re-familisation, which refers to individuals being more dependent on family support in the marketisation process (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005; Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2007; Forrest and Hirayama, 2009; Forrest and Izuhara, 2009; Izuhara and Forrest, 2013; Kennett and Lendvai, 2014; Gauthier et al., 2016). Contemporary research about defamilisation and (re-)familisation incorporates a gender lens to understand welfare states in comparative scholarship, broadening the debates about the significance of state-market-family relations in regard to women's paid work and unpaid care work. However, there are also some deficiencies in this approach. The existing indicators categorising and theorising 'defamilisation' and the welfare typology emphasised quantitative data and policy measurement, for example, labour participation rate, education attainment, and length and compensation rates of maternity and paternity leave. Saxonberg (2013) suggests that outcome- and regime-orientated approaches simply explore the relations between policy measures and intended results and might overlook the implications of socio-economic and institutional contexts for real-life experiences. Both defamilisation and (re-)familisation policy measurements could be perpetuating and challenging gendered roles and equality simultaneously, depending on the institutional, political and economic dynamics in different societies (Saxonberg 2013). More importantly, as Zagel and Lohmann (2021) argued, defamilisation and (re-)familisation could be recognised and investigated as dynamic processes and paths towards individuals' preferred arrangements of paid work and care.

In the context of the persistent gender discrimination in the labour market, women's autonomy to choose not to perform certain family roles does not necessarily lead to increasing female labour market participation rates or ensure women's quality employment, and as a result, lead to women achieving financial independence (Leitner and Lessenich, 2007; Kröger, 2011; Yu et al., 2015b). The defamilisation and (re-)familisation risks in a family relationship further discussed by Yu et al. (2019) are only part of the many dimensions of women's daily lives that are constantly shaped by a wide range of social, economic and institutional dynamics. The focus on promoting labour market participation or fulfilling care responsibilities as independent policy objectives fragment the relations and interactions between paid and unpaid care work in women's everyday experiences and masks their multiple roles and responsibilities (Finch, 2021). In addition, defamilisation, as a Western concept, has as its goal the search for independence from family support, which is not necessarily the case in East Asian societies in which family is not always recognised as a burden and suppression but potentially as a mutual responsibility and commitment. It is, therefore, important to identify and develop an approach that is capable of capturing more than just singular dimensions of policy goals and outcomes and that also interprets and compares the multidimensionality of lived experiences and policy practices with contextual depth.

Alternatively, the capabilities approach has been developed to explore human welfare by focussing on promoting people's abilities to be 'active agents of change' (Sen, 1999: 189-190) and to make autonomous decisions (Sen, 1999; Sen, 2001; Sen, 2008). This approach perceives capacity as positive freedom to do and be. Sen (2008) argues that there are differences between people who choose not to and those who are unable to practise their freedom and preferred lifestyles. This is similar to the discussions of positive and supportive autonomy in social relations by Chan and Bowpitt (2005): individuals are supported to maintain care duties, rather than being forced to do so. Many scholars further incorporate the capabilities approach into research about gender justice (Nussbaum, 2003; Nussbaum, 2004), family policy analysis (Robeyns, 2005), and work-life balance (Hobson et al. 2006; Korpi et al. 2013). To move the debate forward, Kurowska (2018) integrated the important concepts of (de)familisation and (de)genderisation into the capabilities approach and highlighted the equal 'means' of promoting, rather than changing, the 'capabilities' of individuals and 'valued functions' which could be care, paid work or different forms of combinations of both in different life stages. Namely, individuals should be encouraged to practise their choices and preferences rather than changing these choices and preferences, given the resources provided.

These debates highlight the importance of public and social policies in supporting women's autonomy to choose their valued function and practice their choices, for example, labour market participation. Alternatively, they could also be associated with the (re-)familisation perspective, whereby women and men are supported to provide care as another aspect of their valued function. However, there are limitations in social policymaking whereby these two aspects might not be valued simultaneously, or women are suggested and only supported to have formal employment instead of undertaking informal care in the family (Yu, 2018). In addition, individuals' preference to be supported to perform informal care in the family or participate in formal employment, both of which are valued functions, could change across different life stages, and these changes are not always comprehensively supported by the existing policies (Yu et al., 2019; Chau and Yu, 2022).

These gender-focused approaches and debates suggest different ways of researching and understanding the implications of welfare provision and socio-economic transitions for women's rights and choices to work and care and, as a result, challenging or promoting gender justice. These contemporary approaches and philosophies are considered and integrated into the development of the human dignity approach (Chan and Bowpitt, 2005) with a focus on human needs: the fulfilment of autonomy and mutuality. Instead of creating a different approach, this study has woven the elements of defamilisation and (re-)familisation, and the capability approach into the human dignity approach with a focus on fulfilling autonomy and mutuality in different dimensions of everyday lives that are not limited to family relations or labour market participation. It responds to the defamilisation and (re-)familisation risks of performing oppressive and constrained relationships and contextualises the 'active agents to change' informed by the capabilities approach. Applying the human dignity approach in the research of Chinese women also offers a way to take the current debates forward by analysing five relational dimensions of everyday lives: well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value.

In this study, the development and application of the human dignity approach aim to bring analytical and theoretical advancement in the case of modernising rural and urban China. With a well-articulated theoretical foundation and multi-dimensional analytical framework, the human dignity approach developed by Chan and Bowpitt (2005) intentionally brings together the concepts of autonomy, previously addressed in the capabilities approach, in the Western philosophical traditions and mutuality in the Confucian traditions seeing them as critical to fulfilling human nature and needs. More specifically, it recognises the equal importance of people’s autonomy and independence affected by monetary measures (e.g., labour participation and welfare provisions) and mutuality and interdependence in human interactions (e.g., interpersonal and care relations in the family). Therefore, the human dignity approach is a better fit to investigate and reveal the complexity of the interactions of Chinese modernisation and transforming Confucianism and its implications for rural and urban women’s heterogeneous everyday lives. The following sub-section further discusses how this approach is critically reviewed and developed to bring the human needs and dignity perspective in understanding and researching women’s everyday experiences in Chinese modernisation.

3.1.2 Human dignity and two philosophical strands: Autonomy and mutuality

Informed by the discussion in the United Nations General Assembly 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights positions human dignity in a human rights framework. It recognises humans’ equal dignity and rights based on their being human. However, the conceptualisation of human dignity is not only constrained to human rights but also extends to religion in different social contexts. In Confucian values, dignity can arise from mutual responsibility and commitment (Lin, 1988; Fisher and Tu, 1994); benevolence and righteousness emphasise social interaction and involvement. Confucius linked ‘human dignity’ to charity, whereas Mencius recognised human dignity as righteousness (Fisher and Tu, 1994). These notions of human dignity function as ethical and moral rules to live a dignified life as a human being—devoting oneself without expecting rewards, accepting society’s responsibilities and having integrity in the face of moral tests.

As Chan and Bowpitt (2005: 5) suggest, the human dignity approach positions dignity as the highest value in society and the ‘worthiest goal’. Chan and Bowpitt (2005: 13) recognise the value of people’s possession of rationality and the ability to pursue autonomy and mutuality, which are the essence of the fulfilment of human dignity. Autonomy is often discussed as one of the essential human needs and nature in Western intellectual traditions (Chan and Bowpitt

2005). Most scholars refer to autonomy as people's resources and opportunities that allow them to decide their life course independently out of personal interest (Kant and Paton, 2005; Mishra and Tripathi, 2011; Hasselberger, 2012). Recognising autonomy as competence and freedom to choose, Chan and Bowpitt (2005) highlight the importance of exploring how individuals are supported to make their real choices with agency and autonomy as one of the policy objectives. In addition to competence and freedom, informed by Chan and Bowpitt's (2005) discussions, autonomy in this study also refers to the feeling that one has choices and recognises these choices.

Confucian traditions and transforming Confucianism in contemporary China prioritise collective interests, duties and mutual commitment to each other (see Chapter 2, section 2.2). Chinese philosophical traditions and contemporary social norms still stress the interlinked social networks in which individuals, families and civil society are closely woven together, given that everyone needs to fulfil specific duties as a 'citizen' (member of society). In Chinese cultures and a Confucian context, human dignity comprises a strong sense of interdependence and mutuality. Recognising these variations in understanding human dignity between the West and the East is essential before applying the human dignity approach to a Chinese context. Informed by this Confucian philosophy, Chan and Bowpitt (2005) integrate mutuality, referring to interdependent and supportive social interactions as another essential human need and policy objective to articulate the human dignity approach. Based on the conceptualisation of mutuality, Chan and Bowpitt (2005) highlight the policy objective that public welfare should provide adequate resources and support for one's social interactions in care relations, civil society participation, workplace interactions and other personal networks.

Drawing from these two philosophical strands, the human dignity approach emphasises the importance of supporting individuals to make choices rationally and build up social interactions. It informs the ontology of how to see and understand women in this study. As discussed in sub-section 3.1.1, contemporary approaches and debates often focus on one perspective in compensating care work or promoting paid work; however, such approaches fragment human needs in maintaining autonomy and mutuality. The human dignity approach has addressed these issues by highlighting the equal importance of maintaining autonomy and mutuality when researching women's experiences. Informed by this approach, moving away care relations and family responsibilities from women is not recognised as the ultimate goal but one of many choices. Additionally, it is important to note that fulfilling women's autonomy and mutuality is not the only policy objective. From a gender perspective, whether or not this process of fulfilling autonomy and mutuality has promoted gender justice for different women groups is also crucial and a central concern in this study (see more discussions in sub-section 3.1.4).

3.1.3 The critique of human dignity approach

Several deficiencies in this approach and analytical framework need to be addressed before applying it to assess women's everyday experiences in contemporary China. As Hall (2006) and Bennett (2007) critically point out, there is a limited specification and contextual depth about the variations of the researched individuals and groups/welfare recipients. Initially, this framework was only applied to unemployed people by Chan and Bowpitt (2005). The application of the human dignity framework is still specific and limited to unemployed people and the welfare provisions relevant to unemployment. Therefore, more applications to other welfare recipient groups and welfare provisions are needed to evaluate the validity of this analytical framework. In a later work, Chan et al. (2008) developed the human dignity approach with an additional area—a just polity—and applied it to analysing Chinese social policy development in labour, education, health, social security and housing, focusing on the well-being development in modern China. Chan et al. (2008) have further enhanced the validity of the analytical framework by assessing the different welfare recipients in different types of welfare provisions in the Chinese context. This application has shown the analytical and theoretical feasibility of adapting and developing key dimensions for researching different groups of people and policy fields.

Even though a broader range of dimensions for assessing policies in this approach could provide a comparative picture of people's multidimensional and multifaced lived experiences, a specific dimension could be more important and accurate than another in understanding the lived experiences of different groups of people. For example, the dimension of learning is less significant in the existing literature relevant to women's everyday experiences and the practices of gender justice. Informed by the current research (see Chapter 2), this study has revisited and developed the initial dimensions and policy objectives in the human dignity approach to ensure the validation and effectiveness to accommodate the contextual depth and the existing knowledge gap regarding the raised research questions (see Section 3.2 and 3.3). More importantly, this approach was not initially with a gender lens. To understand women's experiences, it is essential to thoroughly discuss the relations between two key concepts—human dignity and gender justice—and incorporate and operate a gender lens in this analytical approach. The following sub-section, 3.1.4, will address this gender perspective and discuss the conceptualisations of gender justice and how this gender perspective is integrated into research on women's everyday experiences.

3.1.4 Gender justice and the human dignity approach

Gender justice and human dignity are two important elements in this study. However, a gender perspective and human dignity have rarely been connected in contemporary debates and research. Previous discussions connecting human dignity and gender issues have focused mainly on women's biomedical bodies and violence against women, while this leads to a narrow interpretation of female human dignity in which the aim is 'protecting women's bodies from exploitation' (Krook and Childs, 2010; Lorber, 2012; Thiem, 2014). These discussions are limited in that they do not explicitly recognise and engage with a broader context in which social, institutional and political dynamics interact and reconfigure women's experiences. The fluidity and expansiveness of different gender issues have caused more complications in capturing relations with human dignity via institutional, social and political dynamics (Thiem, 2014).

Gender justice has long been a concern of academics, feminist activists and the public (Fraser, 2007). However, there is still a lack of consensus in the existing literature on the conceptualisation and measurement of gender justice. In its contemporary meaning in China, the expressions of gender justice include equal legal protection for and treatment of women and men, particularly in the public sphere (Ji and Wu, 2018). However, such discussion mainly focuses on institutionalised legal rights in law-making and the legal system in a top-down process. It rarely pays attention to interactions between the public and private spheres or formal and informal institutions—for instance, policy narratives, practices and social norms—in shaping gender justice.

Okin (1989) initiates the debate on justice in family practices in the Western context, criticising Rawl's (1971) theory of justice in that it emphasises justice only in a social and political structure while overlooking justice in the family, which is a basic and important social unit. According to Okin (1989), as part of the private sphere, the family has underlying and implicit power dynamics and oppressions that permeate it via the public patriarchy. Okin's conceptualisation of gender justice interlinks family, the workplace and the political structure, breaking the dichotomy and separation of public and private spheres in the previous theory of justice. In addition to connecting family practices and linkages with gender justice, Okin (1989) argues that gender inequalities practised in family relations are often translated into the workplace through unequal divisions of labour of paid and unpaid work and vice versa. This process is recognised as a 'vicious cycle' institutionalising gender injustice between the workplace and family. In the Chinese context, family practices and traditional Confucianism are rarely connected to gender justice. Rather than pursuing justice, harmony as Confucian traditions focuses on how family relations should work, potentially hiding and silencing gender inequalities within the family (see sub-section 2.3.2).

It is worth mentioning that Okin's (1989) discussion treats families as homogenous units and does not recognise the variations among different families. Chinese society is rooted in strong family ties that are embedded in Confucian traditions. As evidenced in the gender ideology and social norms discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2, women's roles as the daughter (in-law), wife and mother are embedded in their family contexts, which can vary geographically, socially and economically across rural and urban China. With extra focus on the interaction of women's multiple roles and responsibilities after becoming mothers, this study considers these variations of women and their families that potentially distinguish women's everyday experiences.

Beyond considering gender justice within the family, Fraser (2001) provides a more comprehensive conceptualisation of gender justice in two key dimensions, including the redistribution of resources to offer choices and to recognise the needs regarding different decisions. Fraser's (2001) redistribution and recognition justice conceptualise gender justice as 'institutionalised patterns of cultural value equally'. In terms of redistribution, Fraser (2001) recognises that gender plays the principal role in organising economic structure in a capitalist society. These masculine centrism structures are centred on paid 'productive' work and unpaid 'reproductive' work, culturally and institutionally assigning women the primary role in the latter. Additionally, paid work distinguishes between well-paid, male-dominated manufacturing and professional jobs and low-paid, female-dominated 'pink collar' and domestic service jobs (Fraser, 2008).

Nussbaum (2003) joins the debate by criticising the deficiency in Fraser's 'participation equality' and develops a more substantial capabilities approach to understanding women's lives: gender justice should not only be formally and informally about institutionalised justice, but it should also be about enabling and developing women's different capabilities with an enhanced choice set. Nussbaum (2003) argues that individuals should be allowed to make real choices by giving appropriate resources and respecting other alternatives. This approach recognises the need for human connection and bonding within the family out of love and caring, identified as 'interdependence', rather than coercive commitment and responsibility resulting from constrained choices. The conceptualisation of interdependence is also discussed in Confucianism as benevolence and righteousness. Recognising the human need to fulfil interdependence and build harmonious interpersonal relations matches the Confucian traditions practised and further developed in Chinese society (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2). However, unlike Nussbaum's conceptualisation of interdependence involving a gender lens, Chinese benevolence and righteousness in Confucianism highlight interdependence through mutual commitments and responsibilities in individuals–state relations and relations among family members, rather than starting from women's interpersonal relations.

Informed by the work of Okin, Fraser and Nussbaum, gender justice, one of the key terms in this study, refers to the formal and informal institutions and the accountable process of constructing and maintaining gender equality through addressing and eliminating inequality between women and men (Goetz, 2007). As a substantial outcome, another similar concept—gender equality—is recognised as the equal social and economic rights, resources and opportunities between women and men across all sectors of society (Pascall and Lewis, 2004). More than focusing on equality as a substantial outcome, this study attempts to identify the systems and processes that construct the way of organising resources and opportunities and thus produce and reproduce inequalities in the family, the market and the state. Being recognised as a dynamic process, gender justice discussed in this study intends to reveal the manifestation of both equal distributions of resources/opportunities (equity) and equal results (equality) in all spheres of life for both women and men and this process is equally important among different women and men groups.

In explaining the human dignity approach, Chan and Bowpitt (2005) argue that fulfilling autonomy and mutuality are fundamental human needs and policy objectives (see section 3.1.2). By integrating Nussbaum's (2003) debates about women's capabilities with the human dignity approach, the connection between human dignity and gender justice highlights the importance of supporting women's autonomy and mutuality by enhancing choice sets and resources. The human dignity approach, therefore, offers a way of understanding the practice of gender justice and enriching its conceptualisation through the perspective of human needs and the multidimensionality of women's everyday lives. In this study, gender justice is embedded in the policy objectives drawn from the human dignity approach—namely, supporting autonomy and mutuality. When connecting human dignity and gender, Thiem (2014) also argues that gender should not be viewed as and limited to 'women's issues' or 'family issues'. Instead of only focusing on women undertaking paid or unpaid care work, these discussions inform the operation of the human dignity approach when analysing women's multi-dimensional experiences and conceptualising gender justice in Chinese modernisation: how women's autonomy and mutuality are supported and overlooked and how this process constructs the way of organising resources and opportunities for different groups of women and men in the family, the market and the state.

3.1.5 Assessing human dignity via a gender perspective

Previous sub-sections have discussed the philosophical stances and the theoretical concepts in the human dignity approach, which comprise autonomy, mutuality, human dignity and gender justice. More specifically, the developed human dignity approach in this study, which is informed by Chan and Bowpitt's (2005) original human dignity approach, suggests the following five dimensions, also recognised as policy objectives, to explore the complexity and multidimensionality of women's everyday experiences: physical and psychological well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value. The original version (see Table 3.1) included psychological and physical well-being, fulfilling care duties, social integration, human learning, self-determination and equal value. These dimensions are adapted for this study, as shown in Table 3.2. The author developed and revised the table to configure an analytical framework for this study.

This approach informs the research design, data collection and analysis and focuses on these dimensions to explore women's experiences. These dimensions are used to identify relevant secondary data, including quantitative datasets with essential indicators and policy documents and to develop the semi-structured interview questions for collecting empirical data with policy stakeholders and women as individual informants (see Chapter 4). In addition to analysing each dimension individually, this approach also reveals how these different dimensions interact and how these interactions are manifested among different groups of women's everyday lives. The following section, 3.2, explores the conceptualisation of these dimensions from a gender perspective.

Table 3.1 Key Dimensions of the Human Dignity Approach in the Chan and Bowpitt's Study

Dimensions	**Areas of analysis**
Physical and psychological well-being	(1) Financial assistance for buying daily necessities for maintaining physical health (2) Health care for physical functioning. (3) Psychological support for mental health. (4) Training of welfare workers and the administration of a welfare system which deals with the psychological needs of recipients
Fulling care duties	(1) Support for parents to fulfil duties of care in health, education and social activities.
Social integration	(1) Support for recipients to participate in social and cultural life. (2) Welfare images of recipients presented by the state.
Human learning	(1) Government's ideas about human learning. (2) Support and opportunities for recipients learning and developing skills.
Self-determination	(1) Opportunities and extent to which recipients are able to participate in policy making. (2) The extent to which receiving benefits promotes self-determination
Equal value	(1) Government's attitudes towards the value of different social groups. (2) Special programmes for meeting special needs of disadvantaged groups (3) Equal treatment in terms of age, gender, race or class.

Source: This is the initial table and dimensions developed by Chan and Bowpitt (2005: 29).

Table 3.2 Key Dimensions of the Human Dignity Approach Developed in this Study

Dimensions	Areas of analysis
Physical and psychological well-being	(1) Emotional, material and care support from family (2) Well-being support and challenges under the interaction between family and the labour market (3) Support and challenges from the welfare regimes through policies and social services (4) Effects of interaction between motherhood and paid work on well-being
Care relations	(1) Autonomous choices to maintain care relations with support (2) A fair proportion of care responsibilities
Social integration	(1) Different forms of social attachment in the broader society (2) The maintenance of an interpersonal network (3) Cohesion and inclusions of the labour market (4) Sense of belonging, community, security and acceptance
Self-determination	(1) Individual financial independence and empowerment via welfare provisions, paid work incomes or other forms of income (2) Participation in the decisions on household incomes (3) Decisions on critical life events (4) Dilemmas, pressure and constraints in decision making
Equal value	(1) Fair share and equal recognition in the division of labour in paid work, unpaid care work and other forms of social integration (e.g. political participation and community events) (2) Equal treatment, the sense of equal attitudes, participation and self-determination among different groups in terms of social stratification in age, gender, and household residency (3) Extra support and programmes for meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups with fewer resources

Source: It is revised and developed by the author from Chan and Bowpitt (2005: 29).

3.2 Conceptualising women's everyday experiences via the human dignity approach

To incorporate a gender perspective into the human dignity approach, this section discusses and presents how each dimension is reviewed, conceptualised and interacts with the central concept of gender justice and human dignity. It also introduces and informs how these dimensions with a gender perspective will be applied when analysing and understanding this study's secondary and empirical data (also see Chapter 4, Section 4.3).

3.2.1 Physical and psychological well-being

Chan and Bowpitt (2005: 29) recognise physical and psychological well-being as fundamental conditions and argue first and foremost that they are necessary policy objectives in the fulfilment of human dignity. Furthermore, they argue that it is essential to have 'health for actions' (Chan and Bowpitt, 2005) in rationally fulfilling potentials, engaging with society, and addressing family and work duties. Regarding physical well-being, Chan and Bowpitt (2005) centre on how individuals' physical needs are supported by a minimum standard of living and primary medical care among welfare recipients. Psychological well-being focuses on how psychological needs are supported or challenged by the experiences of applying for public assistance and encountering staff with (or without) professional training.

Owing to the welfare system reforms of the 1980s (see Chapter 2, sub-section 2.1.2), the Chinese healthcare system has shifted from a universal and low-level coverage service to a market- and employment-based one. The healthcare system depends on the financial situation of the local government. Individual access to health care is decided by their financial and employment status, with or without work-related benefits, rather than equal entitlement as part of human rights. Health inequality in China is also recognised as a structural challenge (Yip and Hanson, 2009). Contributory-based healthcare insurance is bound to one's formal employment status. Those in the informal labour market and rural residents have less access to (and receive a lower quality of) health care (Yang and Kanavos, 2012). For instance, the entitlement to women's maternity welfare, including prenatal health checks and medical subsidies, is directly decided by women's formal employment status. Those excluded from formal employment are also excluded from access to public health care. Women with different resources and various residency statuses (see Chapter 2, sub-section 2.1.4) can experience different life chances and barriers to accessing physical and psychological well-being support. In considering this theme, it is important to account for the association between residence and income level in shaping one's access to well-being support and the degree of inequalities in well-being across different groups of women.

Women's physical and psychological well-being involves more than the absence or presence of health care in professional public and social services. When integrating the gender lens into women's well-being, how to measure and assess their well-being is still debated (Yu and Sarri, 1997; Bowling, 2005). Beyond reproductive health, the contemporary debates about women's physical well-being have been connected to their interaction with interpersonal relations, socio-economic status and equal treatment in broader society. Research on gender inequalities in well-being often attributes women's more disadvantaged well-being to their multiple roles and care responsibilities, particularly after they become mothers (Tang and Tang, 2001; Connelly et al., 2018). The quantitative measurement of subjective well-being standardises the understanding of well-being while unavoidably neglecting the contextual depth of different women's situations. In studies adopting a gender perspective, consideration of work–life balance is another common approach to assessing women's well-being. However, as Barnard (2018) critically points out, there is a persistent gendered notion of work–life balance in that women always seem unable to fulfil the 'balance' that can potentially support women's well-being.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (sub-section 2.3.1), the increasing demands for fulfilling the 'good mother' role and the productivist ethos in the competitive labour market have highlighted more challenges for women with children in terms of balancing childcare, parenting, paid work, and personal time. Tang (2001) points out that these multiple roles and responsibilities in the family and workplace are closely connected to women's fatigue in physical well-being, stress and anxiety in psychological well-being, and the lack of interpersonal time in social well-being. More severe depressive symptoms have also been found among full-time care providers because of the loss of income and the dependency on their male partners (Zhan

2005). However, Stavins et al. (2008) find that the interruptions of working hours, loss of promotion opportunities and decreased economic incomes lead to more mental issues, especially anxiety, among caregivers with paid work. In particular, Liu (2019) suggests that these caregivers are more likely to experience different levels of depression, anxiety and stress, as well as a lower quality of life as they face the challenges of balancing multiple duties and roles in both families and the workplace (also in other social contexts: Mackay and Pakenham, 2011; Mausbach et al., 2012).

Informed by the existing research about the multi-facet of well-being, this study explores the connection between physical and psychological well-being regarding the impact of care relations and social integration. Bowlby's (1953) discussion of attachment theory highlights the relationship between a lack of interpersonal interaction and well-being deprivation, particularly among dependent children and their mothers. Closely linked to care in women's experiences, physical and psychological well-being highlights the importance of adequate professional medical support and recognising 'intimate and warm' (Chan and Bowpitt 2005: 18) interdependent relations as fundamental human needs to maintain social and psychological well-being. Drawing from these discussions, this dimension assesses the resources and welfare provisions of the family, the state and the market. More importantly, from a gender perspective, this dimension recognises women's well-being is located in the process and result of resources and opportunities potentially allocated unequally between women and men across generations and places. It also further explores how women's well-being interacts with other themes developed in this approach, such as time for care relations, chances of social integration, and other forms of well-being deprivation under the intersecting dynamics of gender, rural–urban divide and age.

3.2.2 Care relations

Chan and Bowpitt's (2005: 25) human dignity approach emphasises 'care as duties and commitment', which mainly refers to how parents' conditions enable them to support their children's health, education and social life. Although care is recognised as a duty in the original human dignity approach, Chan and Bowpitt (2005: 21) argue for the importance and value of care as a fundamental human need in life, stating that the 'life cycle is a cycle of caring'. As discussed in sub-section 3.2.1, as an essential element in attachment theory, care is not supposed to be recognised as a burden and crisis but, more importantly, as a fundamental human need. In addition, family practices are often interactive and relational. Bowlby (1953) argues that parents can develop a sense of meaning and pride, enhancing their well-being through care. Rather than recognising care as duties in the original human dignity approach, this study conceptualises this dimension as 'care relations', highlighting the reciprocal experiences in care and identifying its equal importance to paid work in enhancing human dignity.

In this study, care relations also refer to the mutual and interdependent family interaction that is not limited to care provision and receiving care in different forms. Chinese family practices concentrate on parents and their dependent children and involve adult children and their older parents (see Chapter 2, section 2.1). With more young labour moving to different locations for economic opportunities, skipped-generational care practices and grandparenting are part of the intergenerational interaction in contemporary China. In addition to gender dynamics between women and men, it is essential to capture the intergenerational dynamics in care relations under the interaction between family traditions and Chinese socio-economic transitions.

With the intersecting dynamics of the household registration system discussed in Chapter 2, the division of rural and urban welfare systems has disadvantaged rural and temporary migrants in different ways, including in terms of the welfare provisions for these people's dependants and their access to educational resources. Women's access to resources affects how they address children's education costs, healthcare provisions, quality of care and parenting experiences. Previous studies applying the human dignity approach have focused on the Minimum Standard of Living System and unemployment benefits for low-income families and their children (Chan and Bowpitt, 2005; Chan et al., 2008). In addition to fulfilling the most minimal care duties discussed in previous research, this theme is also assessed by exploring and comparing how the institutions and policy practices affect different groups of women's resources and choices to maintain care relations and care arrangement.

3.2.3 Social integration

In Chan and Bowpitt's (2005) original human dignity approach, social integration underlines the acceptance and de-stigmatisation of welfare recipients participating in social and cultural life. Chan and Bowpitt (2005) assess an individual's social integration via their participation in social and cultural life, welfare recipients' public image and recipients' social experience. The original human dignity approach mainly focuses on low-income families, individuals and the unemployed, but in this study, the women are drawn from different socio-economic backgrounds. Among different groups of women, financial resources for participating in social and cultural life do not always stem from welfare provisions but also their participation in the labour market and household finances, as supported by other family members. In addition to financial resources, women's paid work, community participation and other forms of social networks are important for women's social integration beyond family interactions.

In a topic as important as maintaining care relations, it is necessary to uncover how women's past and present experiences in the labour market play out regarding their social integration and exclusion. Women's experiences of social integration in the workplace also vary according to the sectors in which they are employed and their work position. Many scholars (e.g., Zeng et al., 2011; He and Wu, 2015; Xu, 2017) suggest another form of institutionalised segregation within the labour market, particularly in urban China—the dual-track system. This system is based on the 'two-tier' workforce (Feng et al., 2020) constituted by a standard and core group of employees and a non-standard and informal group of employees. Unequal treatment across these two groups of employees is common, particularly in terms of salary, paths to promotion and social security. Feng et al. (2020) use the medical industry as a case study and find those female employees are more likely to receive non-standard and informal contracts with lower pay and fewer opportunities for promotion, even though they do the same job as their male counterparts.

Other forms of labour market segregation institutionally exclude and marginalise those with rural residency, those in low-paid jobs, those without job security, and those without legal protection (Wang and Klugman 2020). The household registration system is a state-driven barrier to women's social integration. As Chan et al. (2008) argue, these policy practices highlight another layer of labour market segregation: rural and urban China. Urban priority and strong rural bias in the household registration system largely remained unchanged after the reform in the 1980s (see Chapter 2, section 2.1). Social security still mainly benefited those with urban residency and formal employment centred in urban China in the early reform and transitioning periods (1980–2003; Chan et al. 2008). This institutionalised segregation is manifested in welfare provisions, the market-oriented labour market and further social exclusion for non-local women and those without urban residency. Contemporary research has revealed that the Chinese labour market underlines the multi-layers of stratifications in gender, age and residency segregations institutionalised by policy practices and the market. Given these noted segregations in the labour market, this dimension explores the effects of institutionalised and market-driven barriers on mothers' (non-)working experiences and coping strategies relevant to social integration. From a gender lens and based on women's specific contexts, this dimension also examines women's understandings and their sense of being accepted and included, as a substantial result gender and social (in)justices.

3.2.4 Self-determination

Drawing from the concepts of autonomy and rationality discussed by Hill (1991) and Kant and Paton (2005), Chan and Bowpitt (2005: 27) define self-determination as a person's autonomy to make 'life-affecting and rational choices'; their exposure to opportunities to participate in the policymaking process; and their empowerment to decide their fates with respect, support and a sense of control. These conceptualisations of self-determination mainly focus on decision making participation and the resources for supporting self-determination capabilities. Chan and Bowpitt (2005) recognise policymaking participation as a self-determination focus. In the Chinese political context, it is difficult for individuals to participate in policymaking and thus influence the welfare system. Policymaking in China often occurs in a top-down manner and is decided by senior government officials (Chan et al. 2008). However, this theme will still explore the potential resources and support for women to participate in and influence policymaking and investigate how these political dynamics affect women's self-determination in other aspects of everyday experiences.

Self-determination is a multi-dimensional concept that can be interpreted and understood in various ways (Agarwala and Lynch, 2006). Ryan and Deci (2006) develop the self-determination theory and argue that self-determination is embedded in three psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness. Furthermore, they emphasise the importance and fundamental human need for an external environment that supports agency and individuals' decision making control without pressure, burden or compulsion (Ryan and Deci, 2006). In this study, the discussions and analysis of mothers' self-determination also respond to these psychological elements and map out a holistic picture of their decision making. Namely, this theme will assess how women are empowered and supported to make decisions that allow for the fulfilment of autonomy and mutuality.

From a gender perspective, Liu (1994) defines women's self-determination as the ability and opportunity to control household resources, reputation and power. This definition mainly compares women's status with that of other family members, especially their male counterparts. In particular, multiple scholars have specified the nature and implication of self-determination from different perspectives, including the level of labour market participation, educational attainment, property ownership, income, age and the number of children (Abadian, 1996; Agarwal, 1997; Kabeer, 2002; Garcia, 2003; Street, 2004). At the aggregate level, for example, Malhotra et al. (2002) construct a women's empowerment index to measure how women can assume higher levels of self-determination. The self-determination index includes women's access to public health care, management of household affairs, number of visits to friends and other family members and control of household finances. Researchers score each index based on whether these decisions are made independently, jointly with their husbands or made only by their husbands. Mandal et al. (2017) later review these studies and argue that these indexes contribute to a comprehensive understanding of women's self-determination as a multidimensional concept at different levels and spheres. However, how this self-determination process occurs and the dynamics behind these scores have still not been clearly discussed and revealed. With women's in-depth lived stories, this study will further reveal the dynamic process of how women practice their self-determination and how their self-determination in different dimensions interacts.

With increasing public education resources being allocated to both women and men, it is widely agreed that Chinese women have more self-determination in promoting their human capital through increasingly equal education attainment (Lu and Treiman, 2008; Yu et al., 2015a). According to Wang and Klugman (2020), employment opportunities based on competition and competence allow women to gain more self-determination via formal and standard employment and its attendant social security. However, it is also worth noting that women can practice more self-determination with increasingly equally distributed resources, for instance, in educational attainment and labour market participation, but this might not happen for all aspects simultaneously (Malhotra et al., 2002; Zhang and Ong, 2008). Malhotra et al. (2002) note that women's higher level of self-determination in the workplace does not always translate into more self-determination in family practices, although the two are connected. In addition, as La Guardia and Patrick (2008) have suggested, a higher level of self-determination in domestic work does not necessarily signify a similar level of self-determination in the division of labour between paid and unpaid work. It may reveal that women are primarily responsible for household management. Therefore, when analysing women's self-determination in family practices and the workplace, this dimension will illustrate the processes of negotiation, exertion of agency and final decision making given to women's resources and support in family, workplace, the welfare system and a wider social context.

3.2.5 Equal value

Informed by the studies of Chan and Bowpitt (2005) and Chan et al. (2008), this section discusses and conceptualises equal value from intrinsic human capacities, recognition and treatment from the state and the market, and equal value of the division of labour between women and men. Chan and Bowpitt (2005: 28) recognise human beings as equal in terms of their 'intrinsic capacities'. They define equality as 'a recognition of human capacities' (2005: 28) that supports individuals' participation in society regardless of gender, class or race. In addition to recognising intrinsic capacities, equal value also requires the government to safeguard the respect and dignity of all rather than differentiating welfare recipients from non-recipients. Chan and Bowpitt (2005) highlight the equal value of every human being and the importance of recognition and equal treatment of individuals in the welfare system via a top-down approach. To enhance previous discussions about equal value, this study also engages in dialogue with women through in-depth semi-structured interviews, exploring their understandings and practices of equal value in their specific contexts.

As clarified in 3.2.3, the segregation in an urban- and employment-based social security arrangement and labour market highlight the welfare disparities between rural and urban women, between women in informal and formal labour markets, and between stay-at-home and working mothers. Such institutionalised segregation and exclusion point to the challenges of practising equal value among women with different specifications. As Chan et al. (2008) argue, the most prominent and challenging barriers to practising equal value are the division of rural–urban welfare systems and the exclusion of non-standard labour market participants. These multi-layered inequalities and divisions in contemporary China are enacted and further manifested through different policy areas, including social security, labour, education, healthcare and housing. They intersect with different aspects of women's everyday experiences researched in this approach.

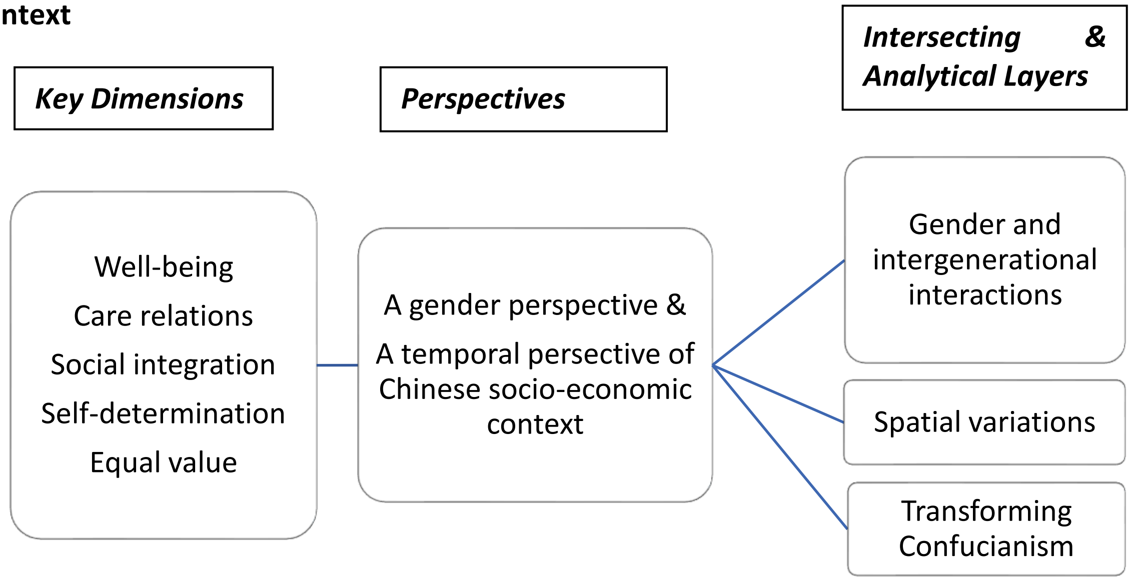
From a gender perspective, a series of discussions about equal value has focused on 'equal pay for work of equal value' between women and men (Rubery, 1992; Hill, 2013). Plantenga et al. (2009) summarise that the equal value of a job is evaluated based on objective criteria in terms of qualifications, working environment and efforts needed for the job. Hill (2013) discusses the equal value of (unpaid or low-paid) care work and highlights the importance of recognising the equivalent value of the care industry and other industries. A series of studies have measured and compared the value of paid and unpaid care work through time use, invested efforts, skills and well-being. Dong and An (2015) calculate the monetary value of unpaid care work in five models and suggest that the value of unpaid care work occupies up to 32% of the Chinese GDP and 80% of the GDP contribution from the tertiary industry. By highlighting the economic contribution of these works, these scholars challenge the previous assumption that unpaid care work is less economically valuable than paid work. Embedded as it is in a gender perspective (also see sub-section 3.1.3), this study recognises paid and unpaid care work as having equal importance and value in socio-economic development.

3.3 Addressing interacting dynamics in the human dignity approach

The human dignity approach offers a comprehensive way to understand the multidimensionality and complexity of women's everyday experiences. Recognising multidimensionality is important because women can face more opportunities and resources in one dimension while more challenges in another. Moreover, these comprehensive dimensions can be understood according to different spheres, public or private, at different levels, at the individual, household, and aggregate levels, which also intersects with the spatial and temporal perspective in this study. The previous two sections discuss the substantial content of the human dignity approach, including the ontology as a way of seeing and researching women, philosophical stances and theory about autonomy and mutuality, and an analytical framework with five key themes: physical and psychological well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value. With a focus on these five dimensions, this study will implement and operationalise the human dignity approach and analyse women's complex, multi-dimensional, and multi-faceted everyday experiences.

When undertaking research that involves women living in contemporary China, it is critical to avoid applying only Western theoretical frameworks or falling into the trap of overemphasising the uniqueness of Chinese and East Asian societies. In addition, previous applications of the human dignity approach have been limited to evaluating public welfare provisions and specific schemes, such as minimum living allowances. This narrow focus on the welfare system can overlook the interaction between social, economic and institutional dynamics that profoundly shape one's everyday experiences in different ways. To address these issues, this section develops Chan and Bowpitt's (2005) human dignity approach by explicitly addressing the interrelations between social, economic and institutional dynamics. Coherently intersecting with the five dimensions discussed above (see section 3.2), three analytical layers— gender and intergenerational interactions, the rural–urban divide, and transforming Confucianism—are integrated to enhance the application of this approach to research women's experiences in the Chinese socio-economic context (see Figure 3.1 for the developed analytical framework).

Figure 3.1 Human Dignity Approach with A Gender Perspective and Applied From A Chinese Context


Key Dimensions
Perspectives
Intersecting & Analytical Layers
Well-being
Care relations
Social integration
Self-determination
Equal value
A gender perspective &
A temporal persective of Chinese socio-economic context
Gender and intergenerational interactions
Spatial variations
Transforming Confucianism

Source: Revised and developed by the author from Chan and Bowpitt (2005).

3.3.1 Gender and intergenerational interactions: Independence and interdependence

The autonomy and mutuality conceptualised in the human dignity approach (see sub-section 3.1.2) emphasise that individuals are expected to have adequate resources and multiple choices to maintain their independence and interdependence. As clarified in the literature on family practices (see Chapter 2, section 2.3), it is crucial to recognise the fulfilment of mutual family support and its interaction with women's independence rather than merely aim to detach women from family relations or assume absolute independence from family relations as the only choice for practising gender justice.

Other scholars have also highlighted the importance of intergenerational relations in theorising gendered welfare regimes (Leitner, 2003; Saraceno and Keck, 2008; Saraceno and Keck, 2010; Saraceno and Keck, 2011; Lohmann and Zagel, 2016; Kurowska, 2018). Izuhara and Forrest (2013) have argued that among countries with Confucian traditions and strong family ties, intergenerational solidarity gets reinforced more significantly when public welfare is not effectively established. Previous studies about shifting family dynamics that have informed this study suggest that it is crucial to incorporate a temporal perspective when locating and revealing women's experiences in close connection to intergenerational interactions (also see Chapter 2, section 2.2). This analytical dimension is particularly important in the Chinese context because intergenerational resources are often prioritised to share care responsibilities and protect family members from social risks and emerging uncertainties.

Women's independence and interdependence are embedded in two intersecting family relations—namely, gender relations between women and men and intergenerational relationships between the young and old generations. These experiences are at the crossroads of prevalent patriarchy and the shifting age seniority in Chinese society, as discussed in Chapter 2. Considering the interaction of these two axes, gender and generation, is essential for understanding women's independence and interdependence and the impact of these factors on women within and beyond the family. This analytical layer explores how women's dependence, independence and interdependence are practised throughout the gender and intergenerational interactions in family practices and how these practices reconfigure women's well-being, care relations, social integration and self-determination in everyday experiences.

3.3.2 Spatial variations: The rural–urban divide

As highlighted in Chapter 2, Section 2.1, women's experiences can be contextually specific in different locations due to the different welfare systems and socio-economic landscapes in rural and urban China. Post-reform China experiences an ongoing urban-rural divide, not necessarily argued as a rural-urban dichotomy in the social and economic systems (Pan, 2017). The varied social and institutional dynamics in rural and urban areas are still reinforced by economic and welfare reform (see Chapter 2, sub-section 2.2.2), family planning policies and living arrangements (see Chapter 2, sub-section 2.2.3). For example, the challenges brought by population mobility, e.g., a long distance from older parents, are more prevalent among migrant women than local residents. As Pan (2017) argues, the rural–urban divide is an essential dimension in comparing and understanding the uneven and stratified Chinese modernisation processes. The interaction between gender and spatial variations highlights women's similar or heterogeneous experiences relevant to space and locations. Therefore, this study incorporates a spatial perspective, the rural-urban divide, to understand how locations alongside relevant institutional dynamics reshape women's multi-dimensional everyday experiences. Incorporating this analytical layer allows the comparisons of women's experiences in rural and urban China and the exploration of Chinese multi-faceted and complex modernisation processes. It also enriches the conceptualisation of women's everyday experiences in a transitional society with significant spatial variations.

3.3.3 Transforming Confucianism

Chan and Bowpitt's (2005) framework rarely addresses the interaction between social, economic and institutional dynamics. The discussion about transforming Confucianism reviewed in section 2.2 showed that under the Communist government, the implications of Confucian traditions continue to be influential in people's attitudes and behaviours in everyday life. In contemporary China, transforming Confucianism may not be as evident as in previous decades when it comes to constructing the ideal version of womanhood. Still, the unchanged nature of Confucianism, which includes promoting the precedence of the male child, maintaining filial piety and providing intergenerational support, continues to affect women's everyday lives by normalising the related ethical and moral codes. These social norms urge women to consider family stability, collective interests and social expectations of womanhood with regard to self-determination. Therefore, any analysis of women's everyday lives must explore how transforming Confucianism as a critical social dynamic reshapes these experiences in the Chinese modernisation process.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the holistic and modified version of Chan and Bowpitt's human dignity approach to assessing the implications and impact of the interaction between modernisation and transforming Confucianism on women's everyday experiences in contemporary China. As the primary foundation of this study, the human dignity approach informs the ontology and philosophical stances of research and incorporates women's everyday experiences. Integrated with a gender perspective, it also suggests a coherent and comprehensive way by which to capture the complexity and multidimensionality of women's experiences through five dimensions in physical and psychological well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value. By locating the human dignity approach in the debates of Chinese modernisation, transforming Confucianism and gender justice, three analytical layers, including gender and intergenerational interactions, the rural–urban divide and transforming Confucianism, were added to strengthen the feasibility and coherence of understanding women's everyday experiences and intersect with interlinked dimensions. These intersecting and analytical layers are to explore the similarities and variations among different groups of women, accommodating the contextual depth in a rapidly transitioning Chinese society. The next chapter introduces the methodology of this study and how the human dignity approach informs the methodology, data collection and data analysis of this study.

Chapter 4 Methodology

Introduction

The human dignity approach discussed and developed in the last chapter provides a focused, systematic and comprehensive way to inform and guide the research design and to cohere to the different elements of the research from data collection to analysis. This chapter discusses the methodology, research design, and data collection and analysis. Section 4.1 explains and justifies the methodological and epistemological approaches to address the research questions. Section 4.2 first introduces the sources and how secondary data and policy documents were accessed. It then discusses the case study approach applied in this research to collect semi-structured interview data from stakeholders and individual informants. Section 4.3 highlights the data analysis methods, including descriptive data analysis for national datasets and thematic analysis for document and empirical data. Finally, Section 4.4 reflects on the ethical issues and limitations of the research design and methodology applied in this research and how they are addressed.

4.1 Methodological approach of the study

The methodological approach and the research design of this study are shaped by its focus on the interaction between Chinese modernisation and transforming Confucianism and its implications for the lived experience of women with children in rural and urban China. Based on these focus points, this section discusses the methodological and epistemological philosophy and research approaches applied in the study. A mixed-methods approach has been specifically chosen to address the research questions (see Chapter 1, section 1.2). The mixed-methods research design follows the definition suggested by Greene (2007), representing a mixed-method way of thinking, seeing, hearing and making sense of the world. This dialectical stance suggests a ‘fully integrated and interactive mixed-methods framework’ to guide the mixed-methods inquiry throughout the data collection, analysis and interpretation. In this study, mixed-methods research is not recognised as combining qualitative and quantitative methods or different methods but rather as integrating and linking these methods conversationally and discursively (Creamer, 2018). The mixed-methods research design aims for the complementary nature of mixed methods, providing a more comprehensive and profound understanding of the research questions from different perspectives.

Statistics means that some elements of the ‘truth’ can be partly observed using statistical techniques (Creswell et al., 2011). However, different people can construct multiple truths differently (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2011; Silverman, 2014). The research questions addressed in this study aim to reveal different but interlinked truths in both objective and subjective ways. The philosophical position applied in this study, critical realism, bridges positivism and interpretivism when researching social reality. Critical realism assumes the possible identification of some parts of the truth and multiple ways to understand it (Bhaskar, 1989; Sayer, 2000). This position suggests that social realities are evident in objective social structures and systems; meanwhile, people as individuals contextualise and interpret these realities differently, thereby representing a realist ontology and a constructivist epistemology (Bhaskar, 1989). Reality and social construction mutually give rise to one another in what is recognised as a ‘conjoint constitution’ (Greene, 2007). Rather than assuming that this causality is based on numerical variance and associations, critical realism highlights that the causal reason for the social phenomenon is inherently embedded in specific social contexts (Creamer, 2018). In this study, these social contexts can be individual, local, regional or national, depending on which scales of the contexts are compared.

From a macro perspective, the socio-economic transitions and the interaction between Chinese modernisation and Confucianism are revealed through secondary data from national datasets and policy documents. From a micro perspective, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and women were to uncover how women’s experiences are constructed and shaped and how women respond to socio-economic transitions in contemporary China. Applying comprehensive national statistics and rich interview data enables interactive conversations about how women’s nuanced everyday experiences can be embedded, convergent or contradictory in Chinese macro-socio-economic and micro-individual contexts.

Quantitative and qualitative methods are not used equally in this study. The qualitative method, involving semi-structured interviews, is the main focus of this study to capture rich and contextualised everyday experiences. Qualitative research methods often provide a more in-depth understanding and nuanced dimensions regarding people's lived experiences (Ritchie et al., 2014). By focusing on stakeholders and women as individual informants, this research design may reveal a more dynamic picture of how policy practices and everyday experiences are constructed and reshaped from different perspectives at the macro and micro levels (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Via women's lived perspectives, these empirical data may challenge the male-dominant narrative and present untold and unheard stories about women's everyday experiences.

Finally, this research design does not aim to illustrate every aspect of women's experiences, nor does it try to represent a homogeneous picture of women's opportunities and challenges. Instead, it intends to reveal women's contextualised everyday lives and subjective interpretations via the five dimensions developed in the human dignity approach (see Chapter 3). In secondary and empirical data analysis, discussions of women's experiences focus on their well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination, and equal value.

4.2 Data sources, access and collection

This section highlights the two-stage data access and collection process. The first stage, secondary and document data analysis, supplemented and contextualised the second main stage of data collection based on the case study approach, including semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and individual informants across the rural and urban case study locations.

4.2.1 Secondary and documentary data

It is important to map out a macro and broad picture of the continuities and changes relevant to women's experiences over time to explore the socio-economic transitions in the Chinese modernisation process. Data show one 'fact', not all facts; however, if we do not understand the numerical evidence, we cannot broadly contextualise the social, economic and demographic transitions in which women's experiences are embedded. Secondary and documentary data are advantageous in covering the breadth of the socio-economic context (Lewis and Nicholls, 2014). These secondary and documentary data enabled the study to explore and present a complementary picture to contextualise the semi-structured interview data collected in the next research stage. In addition, the macro and national perspectives of the secondary and documentary data can point to a contrasting scenario compared with the empirical data from women’s everyday experiences. In sum, secondary and documentary data are fundamental to this research in terms of providing broader background information and enriching the understanding of the Chinese socio-economic context relevant to women’s experiences.

Secondary datasets sampling and access

Four primary data sources were used for the secondary data retrieved between 1980 and 2020. First, Chinese Census data were accessed from the public data in the Population Census Office and the National Bureau of Statistics of China. The Census data included the years 1982, 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2020, as well as Chinese 1% sample Census data for 1995, 2005 and 2015. Second, more specific data relevant to women’s welfare, employment and political participation were drawn from Chinese Yearbooks 1990–2020, China Women and Children Yearbooks 1990–2020, and China Population and Employment Yearbooks 2000–2020.[21] Third, in addition to these national and macro data, extra micro datasets, including the China Time Use Survey 2008 and 2018,[22] the China Women’s Social Status Survey 1990–2010, the China Urban Labour Survey 2010 and 2016, and China Family Panel Survey 2012–2018, were used. Finally, annual government reports on family, labour and social security were used to identify the data relevant to women’s experiences and socio-economic transitions in the Chinese modernisation process. With open access, these government reports were retrieved from the official government websites, including the State Council, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Family Planning Commission and the Labour and Social Security Bureau.

Several important variables in Census data investigate the family demographic transitions, including household size, fertility rates, living arrangement, employment status, household registration (rural or urban), gender and age. The data and indicators from the sources outlined above were guided by and centred on the key dimensions informed by the human dignity approach, including well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value (see Chapter 3, sub-section 3.1.3). These indicators included care services, household finance, livelihood source, political engagement, social service participation and time spent in paid and unpaid work. The numerical evidence captured the trends and critical transitions of women's socio-economic conditions after the Reform, which contextualises women's lived experiences drawn from semi-structured interviews.

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[21] The yearbooks collect and summarise employment-related data and indicators from 2000; it is difficult to trace the data back to the 1990s.

[22] So far, the National Bureau of Statistics has collected only the time use data in 2008 and 2018.

Documentary data sampling and collection

Kennett et al. (2016) identified a disjuncture between the practices of gender justice in daily life and the discourse of promoting gender justice in policies and politics. The document forms part of the textual practices of the reality constructed by particular institutions that produced it (Silverman, 2014; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Reviewing the existing documentary data can thus reveal how the government has built and compared the everyday experiences of women with children and gender issues over time.

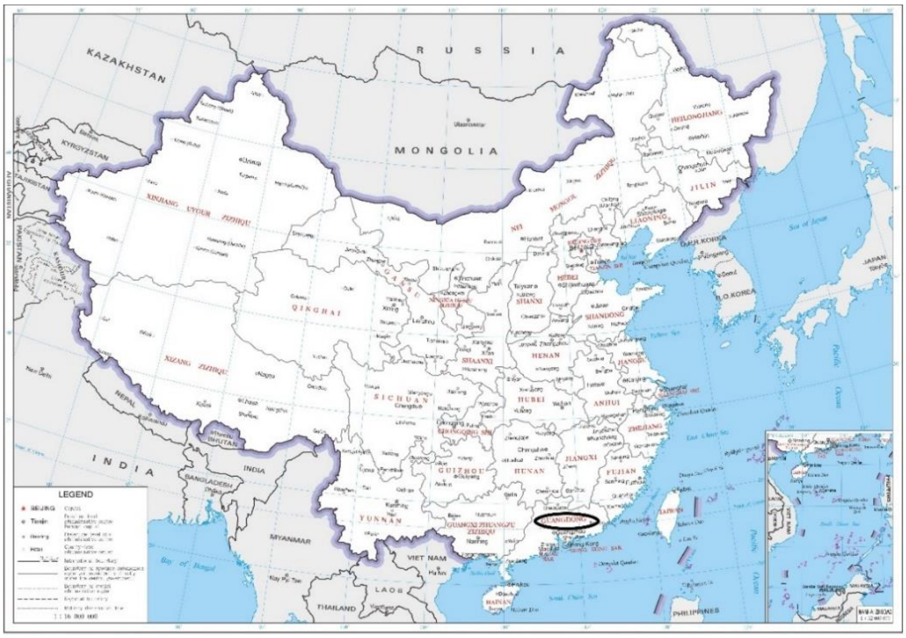
Purposive sampling, which involves selecting the sample units relevant to the research questions and themes (Ritchie et al., 2014), was applied to identify the policy and government documents in this study. Before selection, the inclusion criteria were articulated and informed by the reviewed literature, the key themes in the human dignity approach and research experiences. Documents relevant to women's well-being, care relations, self-determination, social integration and equal value in the family and the labour market were selected. These documents included legislation, official policy reports, and government green and white papers. At the national level, these documents are mainly published by the State Council, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, Social Security, the Ministry of Human Resources and the National Population and Family Planning Commission. Documents issued at a provincial level across urban and rural governments were also selected to contextualise the chosen city and village in the case study locations. These documents are accessible via the National Women's Federation (http://www.women.org.cn/) and the Guangzhou Women's Federation (http://www.gdwomen.org.cn/). In addition, during the fieldwork, the local government officers provided access to the local government's annual handbooks (hard copies). The used documents are listed in Appendix 4. The inclusion criteria for the documents are as follows:

1. The documents were published between 1980 and 2020 (updated until June).
2. The relevant documents provide details about the policy implementation guidance, strategies, measurements, and goals.
3. The relevant stakeholder institutions issued the documents concerning women's welfare and family.
4. The documents are available to the public on official websites or local libraries.

4.2.2 Case study approach: The choice of a city and a village in Guangdong province

Case study research focuses on the in-depth investigation of a phenomenon (Williams, 2000; Yin, 2014). It helps to explore and construct a complete understanding and explanation by integrating different perspectives in a specific context. Here, the case study approach provides a holistic and multi-faceted understanding of women's lived experiences and contributes to a contextualised application of the human dignity approach. China is not a fully integrated monolith; it features socio-economic and geographical variations in different regions, particularly between rural and urban areas (Li, 2012). Under the economic reform, the regional disparity among these different rural and urban regions and across provinces is increasing. Intersecting dynamics of regional disparities (e.g., inland and coastal provinces) and the rural–urban divide have implied the socio-economic variations of individuals' experiences living in contemporary China (see Chapter 2, sub-section 2.1.4). This study mainly focuses on the rural–urban divide in a single province to capture the nuanced and contextualised experiences across two geographical locations. Using a case study approach, it investigates women's lived experiences by focusing on a city and a village in Guangdong province, a coastal province in southern China (see Figure 4.1 for the location of Guangdong province).

Figure 4.1 Location of Guangdong Province in China



Source: China Standard Maps, at <http://bzdt.ch.mnr.gov.cn/index.html>, accessed 01/10/2022.

Guangdong province is a region at the forefront of engaging with and benefiting from the market and taxation reform launched by the central government in the 1980s. Over the past four decades, Guangdong province has rapidly progressed from a planned to a market economy. The proportion of the urban population has also significantly increased from around 55% in 2000 to 74% in 2020 (93 million out of 126 million), more than 10% higher than the national average level (64%; China Census Data 2020). In addition, following the economic reform, the fast-growing labour-intensive sectors in coastal provinces have increasingly demanded that labour moves from rural to urban areas and from inland to the east and coastal provinces. With the largest floating population in China, representing up to 52 million people (National Bureau of Statistics 2020), Guangdong province is a representative site for exploring this modernisation and urbanisation process with frequent rural–urban interactions and dynamic trends in population mobility.

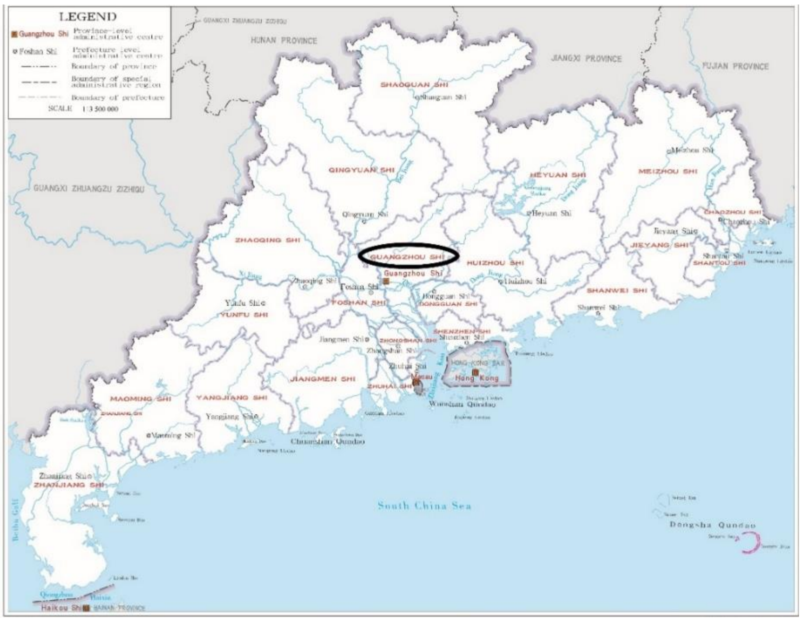
Guangdong province has always been the focus of pilot schemes for the newly implemented policies, for instance, extended maternity and paternity leave, and pilots for child-friendly cities. It is significant that such an economically developed and rapidly marketised province would be chosen, representing a place where women might experience more progression in terms of welfare and equality compared with other inland and less developed provinces characterised by limited socio-economic resources. As a pioneer of the Chinese modernisation process, Guangdong province is an ideal case for this study.

As one of many provinces in China, Guangdong province exhibits significant spatial variations between rural and urban areas. Although there has been a steady annual increase in the disposable income of rural residents, urban residents' disposable income is still 2.46 times higher than that of their rural counterparts (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021b). To a degree, the diversity and vanguard status of Guangdong province represent and account for the direction in terms of the development of China as a whole, providing a comprehensive reference point for other regions in contemporary China (Zarafonetis, 2017). This representative case study captures the everyday situations that reflect the most common phenomenon in a broader context and background (Bryman, 2016). The multi-faceted nature of Guangdong province provides rich case study locations from which to investigate the incongruities and dynamics of the modernisation process in contemporary China.

In this study, a rural case study and an urban case study in Guangdong province were selected; here, stakeholders and individual informants were recruited for semi-structured interviews. Having women and policy stakeholders from different socio-economic settings and welfare systems allows this study to reveal a more dynamic and complex picture of women's lived experiences as affected by locations and social divisions embedded in geo-economic characteristics. These spatial dynamics amplify the understanding of women's heterogeneous everyday life, which has been undergoing rapid transitions in contemporary China. The spatial comparison also provides an interlinked and divergent dimension to view the continuity and changes in women's everyday lives in China's rural and urban locations (Wong, 2004).

Guangzhou city was chosen to be the urban case study in Guangdong province (see Figure 4.2, the location of the urban case study of Guangzhou city). It is also perceived as a vanguard of Chinese cities regarding economic and social development in the new era. In 2019, the GDP per capita reached around £19,000. Primary industry occupied 1% of the GDP, whereas secondary industry occupied 27% and tertiary industry occupied 72% (Guangzhou National Economic and Social Development Statistical Bulletin 2019). Because of the economic advantages and job opportunities in the city, millions of domestic migrants have moved to Guangzhou. However, these domestic migrants, who represent more than one-third of the city's population, do not enjoy the same welfare benefits as those with urban residency (National Bureau of Statistics 2020). Therefore, migrant women with rural household registration were included in the fieldwork to reveal multiple social realities and the multi-faceted urbanisation process in the Chinese modernisation agenda.

Figure 4.2 Location of Guangzhou City in Guangdong Province


LEGEND
Guangzhou Shi Province-level administrative centre
Foshan Shi Prefecture level administrative centre
Boundary of province
Boundary of special administrative region
Boundary of prefecture
SCALE 1:3 500 000
GUANGXI ZHUANGZU ZIZHIQU
HUNAN PROVINCE
JIANGXI PROVINCE
FUJIAN PROVINCE
SHAOGUAN SHI
Shaoguan Shi
QINGYUAN SHI
Qingyuan Shi
HEYUAN SHI
Heyuan Shi
MEIZHOU SHI
Meizhou Shi
CHAOZHOU SHI
Chaozhou Shi
Jieyang Shi
JIEYANG SHI
Shantou Shi
SHANTOU SHI
ZHAOQING SHI
Zhaoqing Shi
GUANGZHOU SHI
Guangzhou Shi
HUIZHOU SHI
Huizhou Shi
Foshan Shi
FOSHAN SHI
Dongguan Shi
DONGGUAN SHI
SHANWEI SHI
Shanwei Shi
Yunfu Shi
YUNFU SHI
Jiangmen Shi
ZHONGSHAN SHI
Zhongshan Shi
SHENZHEN SHI
Shenzhen Shi
HONG KONG SAR
Hong Kong
Zhuhai Shi
ZHUHAI SHI
Macau
JIANGMEN SHI
MAOMING SHI
YANGJIANG SHI
Yangjiang Shi
Maoming Shi
Wanshan Qundao
Chuanshan Qundao
Zhanjiang Shi
ZHANJIANG SHI
South China Sea
Dongsha Qundao
Beibu Gulf
Haikou Shi
HAINAN PROVINCE

Source: Guangdong Standard Maps, at <http://nr.gd.gov.cn/map/bzdt/Index.aspx>, accessed on 01/10/2022.

Village L, located 80 miles away from Guangzhou city, was selected as a rural case study. This rural area began to experience rapid economic development in the 2000s, with increasing township industries and decreasing agricultural land. Village L has around 27,000 regular residents. In 2019, its GDP per capita was around £8,200. The primary industry occupied 7% of the GDP, whereas the secondary industry occupied 60%, and the tertiary industry occupied 33% (Village L Yearbook 2019). Table 4.1 summarises the demographics of the two case study locations.

Table 4.1 Demographics of Guangzhou City and Village L

Cases	GDP per capita (£)	Population in 2019		Industrial structure in GDP		
		Local residents[23]	Migrants	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Village L	7500	27 000	3000	7%	60%	33%
Guangzhou city	19 000	15 300 000	5 770 000	1%	27%	72%

Source: Guangzhou National Economic and Social Development Statistical Bulletin and Village L Yearbook (2019)

4.2.3 Semi-structured interviews: Stakeholders and individual informants

From a micro perspective, lived experiences help to elaborate on the uncertainties and fluidity of everyday continuities and changes (Back, 2015). Qualitative methods are especially appropriate to address ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions that place people in contextualised social, institutional and political dynamics (Yin and Campbell, 2018). Therefore, to enrich and enhance the secondary and documentary data findings, the semi-structured interview was chosen to collect rich and in-depth empirical data from stakeholders and women as individual participants from the rural and urban case study locations.

Using flexible and open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews can investigate people’s attitudes and experiences through interactive and responsive conversations (Lindlof and Taylor, 2019). At the same time, the openness of this method allows more nuanced and complex scenarios to be drawn from the interview data (Ritchie et al., 2014). For instance, I can reframe and adjust the questions about stakeholders’ viewpoints and how they implemented the policies more flexibly to reduce sensitivities during the interviews. Follow-up questions based on the participants’ answers allowed for more in-depth conversations relating to their professional working experiences. For individual informants, interviewed women can share more examples and details about how they negotiate the division of labour with male partners, rather than giving such general statements as ‘we divide the housework and care in half’. With more follow-up questions, I gained additional insight and further clarity about participants' daily lives and understandings that might be taken for granted in their narratives.

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[23] This refers to residents with local household registration residency and with local welfare entitlement.

The COVID-19 pandemic occurred happened at the later stage of the data collection. Following the University of Bristol's instructions, I revised the ethics application forms and applied for approval to conduct interviews online. After receiving ethics approval, the fieldwork was shifted from face-to-face to telephone interviews in late March 2020. To ensure consistency in data quality, all empirical data collected after late March 2020 were through telephone interviews, regardless of whether the interviewees were from rural or urban case study locations or stakeholders or individual informant groups. As a result, 5 out of 13 stakeholders and 13 out of 56 individual informants were interviewed via telephone. More discussions about the adjustment for and impacts of COVID-19 in terms of the research design are discussed in the sub-section 4.4.4.

Stakeholder interviews: Sampling strategies and criteria

When using qualitative methods, the representation of the general population is not the main sampling criterion (Bryman 2016). Instead, it is critical to target participants with specific experiences relevant to the research topics. This study adopted two non-probability sampling methods, including purposive and snowball sampling, to recruit both stakeholders and individual informants. In purposive sampling, the selection of the participants is criterion-based (Patton, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2014). It relates to how the target population can contribute valuable knowledge and experience to answer the research questions.

In Guangzhou City, I recruited stakeholders from the Provincial Law-making Consultant Office, District-level Women's Federation, Family Planning Commission, NGOs and community groups (see Table 4.2 and Table 4.3). In Village L, stakeholders were selected from the Village Committee, the Family Planning Office, Village- and Town-level Women's Federation/representative and an informal women's community support group. These policy stakeholders have worked in their institutions and locations for at least three years. They have had relevant experience in women's welfare in terms of healthcare services, care-related services and subsidies and social security, and an in-depth understanding of gender issues in policymaking and implementation. Stakeholders from these different institutions can reveal the variations in the policy process and policy actors' agency in understanding and practising the policies, which are valuable and important for this study.

Table 4.2 Policy Stakeholders in the Urban Case Study Location

Guangzhou City		
Work Title	**Institution**	**Policy Areas**
1. Lawyer	Family Affairs Law Firm and Provincial Law-Making Consultant Office	Marriage Law and legal protection for women
2. Officer	Family Planning Commission and Women's Federation	Family planning, fertility welfare
3. Director	District-level Women's Federation	Family education and women's welfare
4. Lawer	Women Support Group and Law Firm	Domestic violence, sexual harassment, women's rights
5. NGO leader	Two-child and Family Support Organisation	Two-child policy and childcare
6. Women project officer	Immigrant and Development Organisation	Female migrant, social security and sexual harassment

Table 4.3 Policy Stakeholders in the Rural Case Study Location

Village L		
Work Title	**Institution**	**Policy Areas**
1. Event officer	Village-level Women's Federation	Domestic violence, family planning, female poverty
2. Officer	Family Planning Office	Domestic violence, family planning, female poverty
3. Village L women representative	Village Committee	Family conflicts, female poverty, and domestic violence
4. Officer	Women's Federation	Family conflicts, female poverty, and domestic violence
5. Director	Women's Federation	Women's welfare, activities, and women's general affairs
6. Director	Family Planning Office	Fertility health, family planning
7. Women affairs officer	Social Work Institutions	Women's welfare, activities, and women's general affairs

Recruitment and data collection

Relevant stakeholders were identified using the official or organisational websites based on the focused dimensions informed by the human dignity approach. Personal networks were also used to contact potential stakeholders. To reduce the bias created by the personal network, I diversified the channels and used different personal networks to recruit stakeholders. In the urban case study location, I used two personal contacts, including one manager working in the Women's Federation and a professor working in the department of public policy at the university. In the rural case study location, the personal contacts included a government officer in the village and a friend working in the Village Representative Congress.

Snowball sampling was applied when participants were difficult to access; in this case, such participants were government officers. After recruiting the interviewees via personal contacts and official contact details, I applied snowball sampling to expand the number of stakeholder interviewees working in women's welfare and relevant policy sectors. After collecting the contact information with permission, I contacted these selected stakeholders by e-mail. I also sent a hard copy of the invitation letter and information sheet to their office with an individual and confidential letterbox (see Appendix 5 and Appendix 12).

The topic guide for the stakeholders was formulated based on the literature review, analytical framework and research questions according to themes in the Chinese context (see Appendix 3). In addition, the secondary and documentary data analysed at the first stage helped refine the topic guide to ensure consistency. The topic guide included stakeholders' current working experiences, their involvement in policymaking or implementation related to women's welfare, their understanding of women's opportunities and challenges and their suggestions for enhancing the policy process. Before each interview, each stakeholder reviewed and signed the consent form. With the interviewees' permission, I used a voice recorder to record the interviews, which lasted for 60 minutes on average. These audio recordings were then stored on the drive of the University of Bristol with password protection. Based on the needs and preferences of the stakeholders, the interviews were conducted in either Mandarin or Cantonese. The interviews were transcribed fully into Chinese and quotations were translated into English for the thesis. In addition, the participants' demographic information was collected and tracked on an Excel form. Using this approach, I was able to discuss the appropriateness and diversity of the samples with supervisors, which had the potential to guarantee the data quality and also provided important information that was used to refine the recruitment strategies promptly.

Individual informant interviews: Sampling strategies and criteria

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were applied to recruit individual informants. Purposive sampling set the sampling criteria and helped target women with relevant lived experiences whose inclusion can help answer the study's research questions. The individual informants were recruited from rural and urban case study locations in Guangdong province to examine the spatial variations and heterogeneity of women's everyday experiences. There were two main criteria to distinguish and define rural and urban informants: household registration status (agricultural or non-agricultural) and the length of residency, at least three years, in Guangzhou city or Village L. Female domestic migrants moving from rural areas to urban areas were also recruited. The individual informants had two shared criteria: they had to be 22–40 years old and have at least one child. Those recruited were born after 1980 when the implementation of family planning policies and the reform and opening-up policy profoundly influenced Chinese families and individuals. The substantial age gap between 22 and 40 also reflects the continuity and changes in mothers' lived experiences at different age cohorts. Women's ages are the age when the interviews were conducted, which is used in the finding chapters to specify their demographic information. These criteria were set in an attempt to cover the women's critical life transitions with multiple roles and responsibilities, including pregnancy, motherhood, and, if applicable, marriage and employment.

The individual informants were also sampled and categorised based on their employment status, marital status and household registration location. Stay-at-home mothers or working mothers were chosen based on their employment status. Marital status was used to categorise these women into single-parent households (including single, divorced and widowed women) or partnered households. Single-parent households, becoming increasingly common in local and global contexts, have received increasing attention in current research (Zartler, 2014; Leung and Shek, 2015). By comparing women from partnered or single-parent households, this study intends to broaden the discussions about gender justice among different groups of women affected by their household types and potentially varied family support. In addition, to ensure the diversity of the samples, the recruitment process was conducted to include women who had different educational backgrounds, different employment histories and children of different ages. The specificities and commonalities of being a woman with at least one child provide a rich and in-depth understanding of the women's everyday experiences in fulfilling their multiple roles (if applied) as daughters (in-laws), wives, partners, single-parents, mothers and employees.

Recruitment and data collection

At the urban case study location, I identified interviewees by participating in activities via local NGOs, residential committees and women's support groups. I joined the events organised by the local NGOs for women's affairs and community events organised by the residential committees. In the rural case study location, I contacted women's support groups and village committees and participated in their events to become acquainted with the local villagers. I prepared two brief and clear research posters to introduce both myself and my research topic; these posters were linked to the consent form and contact information. With permission from staff and officers, these posters were shared in the community centres and locations where social gatherings usually happen, such as the activity centres and public dining halls.

By introducing the research project clearly, I tried to ensure that my participants would be aware of their rights and positions when participating in the research rather than under the obligation of a personal network with limited information. As a result, some potential individual informants approached me proactively to make further inquiries about the research and share contact information with me. With permission, I contacted these individual informants by telephone. I then sent text messages to explain the research in more detail (see Appendix 7 and Appendix 13). Later, snowball sampling was applied to expand the number of participants through these recruited interviewees. In the first round of recruitment, 15 out of 56 individual participants were from a personal network. Using the snowball sampling strategy, more individual informants were approached and recruited through the interviewees. To avoid identifying specific people and places, all informants' names will be replaced by new codes unrelated to their characteristics. Some interviewees prefer to use

English pseudonyms, while others prefer Chinese ones. Therefore, some interviewees quoted in this study are in English pseudonyms, while some are in Chinese.

Informed by the human dignity approach and the previous research stages, the topic guide for the individual informants included the women's demographic information, daily routine, family life, work experiences, and well-being (see Appendix 2). With the participants' permission, I used a voice recorder to record each interview as a whole; the interviews lasted for 60 minutes on average, and the recordings were kept on a drive at the University of Bristol with password protection. In Village L, 23 individual informants were recruited. In Guangzhou city, 33 individual informants were recruited, including ten female migrants (see Tables 4.4 and 4.5). The participants' demographic information was collected and tracked on an Excel form throughout the data collection process (see Table 4.6). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, seven urban and six rural individual informants were collected through telephone interviews.

Table 4.4 Individual Informants in the Rural Case Study Location

Working/Household Status	**Single-parent Household**	**Partnered Household**	In total
Stay-at-home mothers	0	2	2
Working mothers	6	15	21
In total	6	17	23

Table 4.5 Individual Informants in the Urban Case Study Location

Working/Household Status	**Single-parent Household**	**Partnered Household**	In total
Stay-at-home mothers	0	11	11
Working mothers	3	19	22
In total	3	30	33

Table 4.6 Demographic Information of Individual Informants

Age	No. of Women
22-29	23
30-35	18
36-40	15
Marital status	
Single	9
Married/Partnered	47
Education attainment	
High school and college	15
BA/BSc	34
MA/MSc	5
PhD	2
Number of children	
One	28
Two	25
Three and above	3
Age of the youngest child	
aged 0-3	30
aged 4-6	13
aged 7-12	8
aged 13+	5
Household registration	
Urban residents	23
Domestic migrants	10
Rural residents	23
Employment status	
Stay-at-home	13
Full-time paid work	26
Maternity Leave	6
Part-time paid work	11

4.3 Data analysis

4.3.1 Secondary data: Descriptive data analysis

During the first stage, I conducted the descriptive data analysis based on secondary data from national statistics and government documents. These data were analysed to reveal the social, economic and demographic transitions and trends in the Chinese modernisation process from a macro perspective. Stata and Excel software were used to conduct the descriptive data analysis with a view to answering the research questions. The descriptive analyses included both univariate and bivariate analyses to assess continuity and changes in different indicators relevant to the five dimensions discussed in the human dignity approach. This was done to ensure coherence and consistency in data analysis throughout different research steps. In this part, cross-tabulations and correlation matrix tables were mainly used to present the social dynamics numerically. The datasets established over the years capture the societal continuities and changes, which is important for finding the patterns and trends of women's socio-economic status and conditions in post-reform China. These descriptive data analyses (see Chapter 5) provided a systematic context for understanding women's situations in China's rapid and dramatic socio-economic transitions. These findings, established from a macro and national perspective, complement and enrich the second stage of the research, in which more questions regarding women's personal stories were addressed via empirical interview data.

4.3.2 Documentary data: Thematic analysis

The documentary data collected for this study were organised using NVivo 12 software. Guided by the five key dimensions in the analytical framework, all the documents were analysed to address how women's needs in achieving autonomy and mutuality in different dimensions of everyday lives are affected by the convergence of social, economic and institutional dynamics. Informed by the conceptualisation of gender justice, the analysis has also identified how the formal institutions and top-down narratives and practices construct the way of allocating and organising resources and opportunities for women and their families. These reports and codes were compared and analysed based on chronology to analyse the continuity and changes of policy initiatives and practices over time. The summary of the document review and the codebook shows how the themes emerged and were informed by the human dignity approach; the themes were then compared with other data sources (numeric secondary data and empirical interview data) to identify similarities, complements and contrasts.

4.3.3 Semi-structured interview data: Thematic analysis

In this study, interview data analysis formed an inductive analysis stage that explored the individual ideas and implications of the social transitions and marketisation regarding women's everyday lives. Inductive and interpretative approaches were adopted to develop different themes regarding women's everyday experiences and multiple roles in the labour market, family and wider civil society. This process contextualises the data and the researcher's interpretation (Holloway and Todres, 2003). NVivo 12 was used to facilitate the organisation of the interview data.

The group of stakeholders represented the viewpoints of professionals and the practices related to women's welfare and other relevant policies. The individual informants revealed and elaborated on their personal stories and lived experiences. I examined and compared the two codebooks and abstracted both stakeholder and individual informant interview transcripts to identify specificities and commonalities between the two groups. After comparing and analysing these two sets of empirical data, I translated the extracted quotations from the coded data into English and analysed them under different themes and research questions. Data analysis requires a consistent framework to sustain the complexity of the data while ensuring its replicability and robustness (Morse et al., 2002). Consistent with the secondary and documentary data analysis, this process was also informed and guided by the human dignity approach, and its five correlated dimensions in the lived experiences of women with children: psychological and physical well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value. Within these five dimensions, how autonomy and mutuality are fulfilled and challenged across different groups of women are compared.

The research adopted thematic analysis to explore, understand and categorise the themes that emerged within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This analysis procedure was based on the guidance from Braun and Clarke (2006) and included familiarising myself with the data, summarising the initial codes, categorising the themes, interlinking the themes and presenting the data. First, I transcribed the interviews verbatim in Chinese. Then, before breaking down the data to conduct the coding, I re-read the transcripts to familiarise myself with the data pattern and summarised the key themes of the data. Third, after abstracting and breaking the data into several parts, I aligned the data back to the research questions and looked for data collaboration and connection (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Flick, 2014). I repeated the three steps outlined above to refine the codes; this refinement involved an iterative and reflective data analysis process.

The themes and data were coded consistently and coherently by following these steps. In the final step, I refined the thematic framework and presented the data to consistently map the linkages between the coded data. Braun and Clarke (2006) have suggested four steps to reduce pitfalls in thematic analysis. I first analysed all the data rather than extracting content simply from a specific part. In addition, I focused on the meanings of each theme in relation to the dataset as a whole. Then, after summarising the themes, I revisited and examined the coherence and consistency among the themes and data patterns. In the last stage, I paid extra attention to the fitness and consistency between the data interpretation and the data proper. In addition, I compared data from individuals within the same site and between the rural and urban case study locations to contextualise their lived stories, depending on their socio-economic and geographical backgrounds. These comparisons provided in-depth insights into the complexity and multidimensionality of women's everyday experiences under the interaction between the Chinese modernisation process and transforming Confucianism.

4.4 Self-reflection, ethical issues and limitations

4.4.1 The researcher's positionality: Being an insider and an outsider

As Taylor (2011) suggests, being an insider or an outsider affects how researchers gain in-depth social insights and simultaneously build trust and empathy with the research participants. During the fieldwork, I constantly felt the dynamic position of being an insider and an outsider in different situations. Being a Chinese woman is part of the positionality in this research. I share the same language and dialects as the recruited stakeholders and individual informants. Regarding social context, I grew up in a similar geo-economic setting between the rural and urban case study locations, giving me the day-to-day insights and experiences from which to understand the rural–urban context in these two case study locations. These similarities in my experiences enabled me to be more confident in examining the Chinese context with in-depth and open conversations about women's everyday experiences.

Throughout the fieldwork, I avoided taking my insider position for granted. I was also aware of the risk of data distortion and misinterpretation that can stem from being an insider without exercising critical thinking skills (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). The interviewees sometimes assumed I understood everything they were saying because we are Chinese women and probably share similar living experiences. However, some nuanced experiences that the women mentioned can not be taken for granted. Therefore, I tried to ask them to give more examples and details to elaborate on what they meant to minimise my assumptions and locate their understandings and experiences in their specific contexts.

As Labaree (2002) and (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) suggest, it is important to be distant from the field and embrace unexplored experiences during fieldwork. With the consciousness of being an outsider during the fieldwork, I positioned myself as a curious outsider and professional researcher who wanted to know more about the participants' lived experiences. First, the participants I recruited all had at least one child. Being an unmarried, non-parent Chinese woman made me an outsider, which allowed me to be more curious and active in learning about women's experiences in different life stages. Second, although I grew up in nearby regions with similar geographical and socio-economic settings and had lived in such regions as an adult, I had to be aware of and recognise my experiences and understandings of gender identity and gender roles under the effect of the learning journey and living experiences in the United Kingdom. These dynamics exposed me to a hybrid of East Asian and Western gender norms and practices.

4.4.2 Personal network: Disadvantages and advantages

As mentioned in section 4.3.3, during the fieldwork, I first introduced myself, my research and how I knew about the participants. The participants approached from my personal network cared about how ‘close’ my relationship with my personal network is, which affected their trust in me and their willingness to continue the conversations and accept the interview invitation. In the Chinese context, it is important to use the personal network (*guanxi wang*, 关系网) to reach a wider range of potential research participants. My personal network also becomes critical to building trust and confidence between the participants and the researcher when the interviews potentially relate to sensitive topics about conjugal relations, sex, and other traumatic memories.

Similar to Xie’s (2021: 30) discussion about the nature of the personal network, it can be said that ‘the nature of the distance’ affects the data quality. In particular, the distance between the participant and researcher in the personal network makes the participant filter what to share and what not to share. This was also the case during my fieldwork. The closeness of personal networks can potentially distort the authenticity of the data when the participants give the answers to sound ‘modern’ on gender issues and to maintain their reputation. At the same time, a close personal network can increase participants’ concerns about confidentiality and privacy and make them less open during the interview (Caers and Castelyns, 2011). Therefore, I was cautious about using close personal networks or relying on the personal network to collect data, which potentially limited the diversity and number of participants I could approach. After using the direct personal network, I tried to expand the samples via those who had been interviewed and invited them to introduce more potential interviewees to me if they fit my sampling criteria and were willing to join the research. By reducing the reliance on the personal network and expanding the access to more potential interviewees through snowball sampling, the conversation about family and gender can involve more open and in-depth conversations because the participants were less worried that a stranger might expose their privacy.

4.4.3 Power dynamics between the researcher and participants

Power dynamics are closely related to the positionality discussed above, including age, experience, region and other forms of socio-economic status. I also paid attention to the power dynamics within the personal network: some were friends and classmates with whom I had more equal power dynamics, whereas others were from the older generations with more senior working experiences. Those in the older age cohort (35–40 years old) were more cautious about what to say and what not to say to people who are younger than them (me as the researcher younger than them), particularly in terms of 'negative' and 'shameful' scenarios in their understanding. Most individual informants were older than me (40 out of 56). I asked them to call me by my first name to reduce the age effect of me being a younger person relative to their age cohort. Additionally, to reduce the effect of age dynamics on open discussions about gender and family issues, I positioned myself as a professional researcher who tried to understand their experiences through open and confidential discussions. Before each interview, I usually re-emphasised the contents of the information sheets and consent form, which helped to restate the interviewees' rights as participants and highlight my professional role as a researcher.

When conducting interviews, power is also dynamic and relational (Råheim et al., 2016). My identity as a PhD researcher and overseas student is also socially constructed; this affected how the participants perceived me and aimed to answer the questions. In interviewees' narratives, developed countries like the United Kingdom in the West are often viewed as more socially and economically advanced than China. The constructed privilege of 'studying in the West' is more evident in rural China, where the socio-economic environment is less developed than in urban China. Although we all identified as female, because of my age and living experiences in the United Kingdom, some interviewees perceived me as an outsider—a non-married and non-parent feminist—and recognised that I am 'Westernised' and have different ideas about gender justice. Some participants mentioned that their experiences were "not worth mentioning" and suggested that I "might think of them as traditional and old-fashioned". When drafting and revising the interview questions and analysing the data, I tried to ensure openness in framing the questions about these mothers' lived experiences and what these experiences meant to them in their specific contexts.

Anyan (2013) argues that the researcher's power shifts in different research stages during qualitative research. As a researcher, I was aware that I had the power to design the topic guide and focus on points that would help answer my research questions. Interviewees, particularly the policy stakeholders with senior positions, also had the autonomy to choose not to respond to my questions directly or skip the questions. Before answering the questions, some policy stakeholders consistently emphasised that "Chinese experiences supporting women and about equality are different from those in the West". As a result, some gave the 'policy mainstream' answers based on the policy documents and chose not to openly discuss more personal understandings of gender issues. Some of these senior government officers with political power dominate and steer the conversations and topics they prefer to talk. To address this issue, I prepared bridging questions to link their discussions and working experiences to the interview questions relevant to my study. Throughout the research, I often reflected on my power to decide on the interview schedules and interpret the data collected, the interviewees' power of how (not) to answer the interview questions, and, more importantly, potential ways of minimising the effects of these fluid power dynamics on the data quality and data analysis.

4.4.4 Conducting fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about an unprecedented challenge for conducting face-to-face interviews. From late March 2020, the fieldwork was shifted to an online context—specifically, telephone interviews. There were advantages and challenges to this change. First, I made full use of the advantages of online interviews, including the fact that they are cost-effective and time-saving for the interviewees and that they can reach wider and more diverse groups of interviewees (Lefever et al., 2007). Meanwhile, I attempted to address the emerging methodological issues along with the data collection and identified a series of ethical, practical and methodological issues that can inform future research designs involving online interviews. As James and Busher (2006) point out, online interviewing has never been an easy choice. Conducting fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic required the researcher to constantly reflect on and review every adjustment in the research design and the associated outcomes (Watson and Lupton, 2022). I read through the literature that addresses the emerging ethics and practical issues in online interviews and tried to ensure consistency between face-to-face and telephone interviews. In the earlier stages of the fieldwork, I visited the research sites, community centre and residential committee office, so most of the recruited interviewees met me before the lockdown; this reduced their concerns about switching the in-person interview to a telephone interview.

Well-being was a concern when people's everyday routines were disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic. When conducting interviews, I considered the interviewees' feelings about uncertainties and anxieties during the pandemic. Participating in the interviews allowed the interviewees to share their daily life experiences, worries and complaints (particularly about home schooling and childcare) with a stranger when staying in the same space restricted to family members during the lockdown. The interview potentially provided a space for interviewees to share and discuss the impact of the pandemic, connecting the researcher and the interviewees with shared experiences. To reduce the unnecessary stress under times of uncertainty, I engaged with the interviewees in a dialogue of empathy and care. More importantly, the interviewees and the researcher's psychological and physical well-being were prioritised throughout the fieldwork.

Shifting face-to-face interviews to telephone interviews influenced the research space, a point that is 'epistemologically and methodologically' critical when reflecting on the whole research process (Geertz, 2000). The switch to online interviews changes the research space in terms of the physical separation between the researcher and the interviewees. This physical absence potentially limited trust-building because of the lack of visual cues, such as facial expressions and immersive observations of the interviewees (Chiumento et al., 2018). Moreover, finding a location and space for interview privacy was challenging during a lockdown. Under the isolation measures imposed during COVID-19, the interviewed women mainly stayed home in a shared space with their family members. Therefore, I considered the interruptions as a result of home schooling and the effects on the openness of the conversations resulting from limited privacy at home when conducting the interviews. To enhance the interviewees' privacy, I encouraged them to wear earphones, and I provided flexible appointment times to choose from. I also tried to support the interviewees to pick a time (with less interruption for childcare) and space (e.g., a private room in the house) that can offer them privacy and ensure that they felt comfortable and sufficiently relaxed to talk.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the methodological approach and has introduced the research methods applied in this study. It has described how the research process was carried out in different stages and how research data were collected and analysed ethically and reflectively. To summarise, the secondary data from national statistics systematically and statistically uncovered socio-economic transitions and their implications over time. Descriptive data analysis revealed the continuities and changes relevant to women's everyday experiences during the Chinese socio-economic transitions. The semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and individual informants then explored women's contextualised personal stories and real-life experiences in rural and urban areas. Thematic analysis was used to examine the interview and documentary data. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were guided by the human dignity approach and led to findings that focus on five themes of women's everyday experiences—physical and psychological well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value. These findings related to women's personal contexts, being a woman with children under transforming Confucianism and modernisation, the comparisons of women's everyday experiences and the continuities and changes in gender and intergenerational interactions in contemporary China. These topics are analysed and presented with the secondary, documentary and empirical data in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Chapter 5 Being A Woman in the Chinese Modernisation Process

Introduction

As highlighted in Chapter 2, since the Reform in the 1980s, different forms of social, economic and policy changes have reshaped women's multi-dimensional experiences at both the macro and micro levels. This chapter discusses secondary data, including national datasets, policy documents and empirical data from stakeholder interviews, to map out the socio-economic transitions relevant to women from a macro perspective. The patterns and trends of social, institutional and policy changes set the breadth of women's situations in contemporary China, articulating the context to investigate women's lived experiences in the subsequent chapters.

This chapter includes three thematic sections. The first section, 5.1, focuses on revealing a comprehensive understanding of the transitions in Chinese families. It elaborates on how these family transformations interact with the modernisation process and transforming Confucianism and affect women's lived experiences within and beyond family lives. From a demographic perspective, this section draws on the continuities and changes in fertility behaviours (5.1.1), marriage and family formation (5.1.2), and living arrangements (5.1.3). Family virtues—reshaped by the market and the state—are explored in the following section, 5.2, revealing social norms and dynamics that affect gender and intergenerational interactions in Chinese family practices (5.2.1). With a focus on relations and social integration, this section also examines the institutional and policy dynamics that shape women's experiences in the labour market (5.2.2) and potential choices for care arrangements in the privatisation and marketisation process (5.2.3).

Drawn on stakeholders' working experiences, sub-section 5.3.1 investigates the collision between the competitive labour market and family traditions and analyses the complication of understanding the dual responsibilities of care and paid work. The following sub-section, 5.3.2, discussed the reshaped narrative and practices of gender justice in terms of the manifestation of the state and local regulations under socialist governance. The final sub-section discusses the effect of the interaction between public and private spheres, highlighting the uneven progress in practising gender justice and the remaining public patriarchy (5.3.3).

5.1 Family transformation in contemporary China

5.1.1 The aftermath of family planning policies: From a burden to a contribution

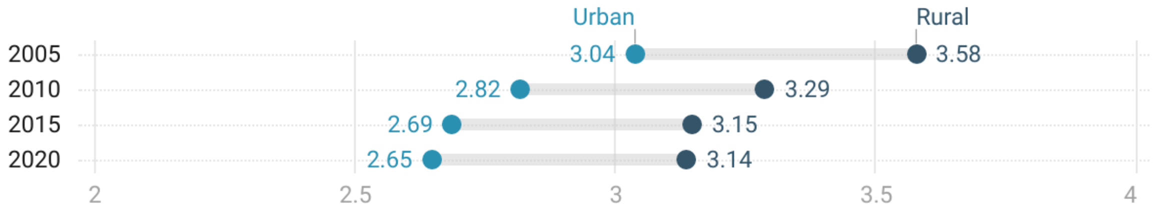
A number of complications and dynamics influence the trend of downsizing families in contemporary China. As the Chinese Census data (1982–2020) show, since the 1980s, the size of Chinese households has generally become smaller (see Table 5.1). The typical family size promoted by the one-child policy, ‘a family of three’ (*sankou zhijia*, 三口之家), has been replaced by a continuously smaller family size; in 2020, China had 2.62 people per household on average. From the more specific data in the China Population Yearbook (2005–2020), it is clear that urban and rural areas are both moving toward smaller household sizes. However, due to the ‘1.5-children policy’ (Gu et al., 2007), which allowed rural families to have one more child if their first child was a daughter, having only one child is still rare among rural families. As a result, shown in the secondary data from national datasets, rural families (3.14 people/household) still have a larger household size than urban families (2.65 people/household; see Figure 5.1). Under these remaining son-preference traditions, rural women are more likely to experience family resource dilution, which refers to each child receiving fewer resources due to a larger sibling group, mainly affected by male siblings in the Chinese context (Galor, 2012; Wang and Feng, 2021).

Table 5.1 Family Size, National Population Census (persons/household)

Year	1982	1990	2000	2010	2020
Household Size	4.41	3.96	3.44	3.10	2.62

Source: China Census Data 1982–2020, National Bureau of Statistics.

Figure 5.1 Household Size by Region, 2005–2020 (persons/household)

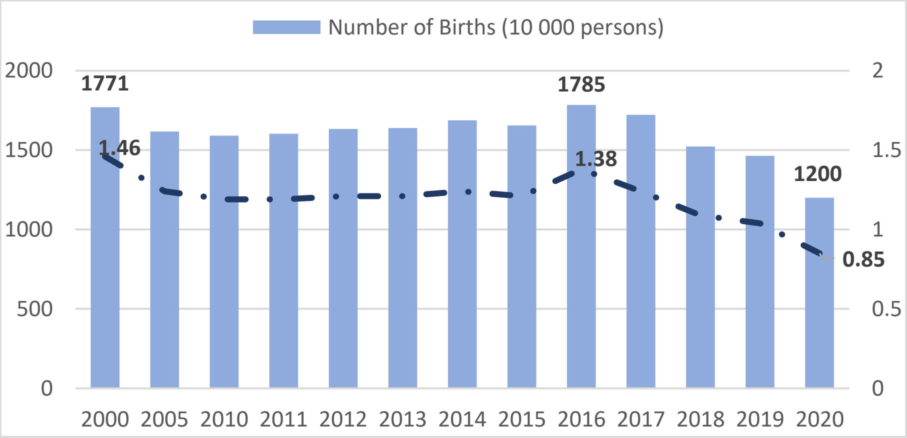


Source: China Population Yearbook 2005–2020, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

The association between economic growth and declining fertility rates in modernised societies, such as European societies (Van de Kaa, 1987), has been well discussed in the existing literature. However, the Chinese context complicates this association because Chinese economic success is not the only factor affecting women's fertility practices over the last several decades. Under the intervention of the Chinese Communist government, the shrinking family size has been intervened by family planning policies, which were simplified as the one-child policy implemented between 1980 and 2015. Chinese family transformations are interactively affected by the interactions between state-led population strategies and socio-economic transitions. If only based on the declining fertility rate, it is difficult to distinguish how much the modernisation process has changed people's understandings and fertility practices.

Over the last two decades, there has been a significant shift in birth control by positioning childbirth as a contribution instead of a burden in policies and practices. In 2013, if the wife and the husband were the only children in their families, they could have two children. Later on, the couple could have two children as long as one of them was from a single-child family. In 2016, the universal two-child policy was implemented, allowing every couple to have two children. However, the relaxation of these birth-control policies does not seem to have greatly impacted people's choice to have one or more children (see Figure 5.2). The fertility rates still did not return to the desired level. The state's role in intervening and monitoring people's fertility behaviours is not as influential as it once was. It also indicates that other socio-economic dynamics are becoming more important in shaping people's fertility practices.

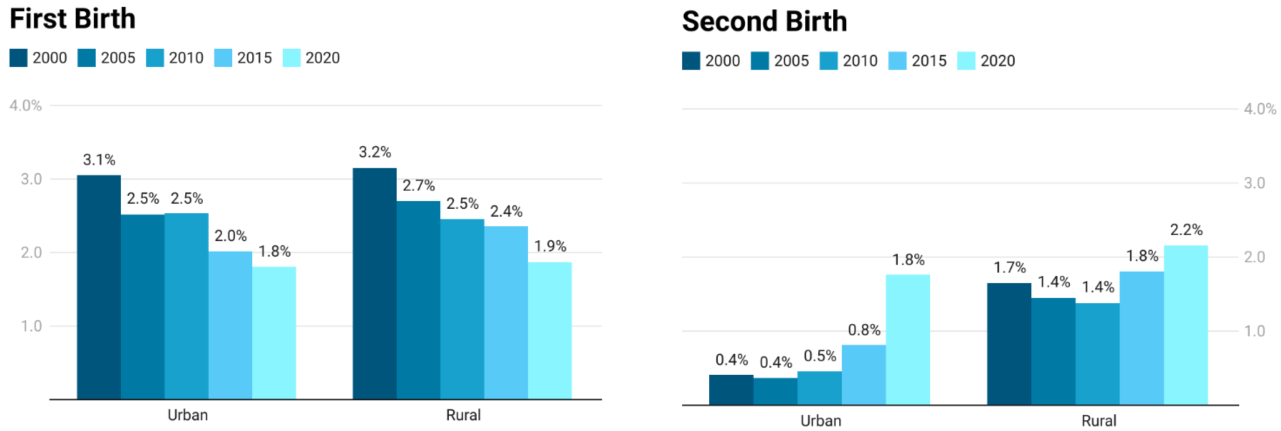
Figure 5.2 Number of Births and Birth Rate, 2000–2020



Source: China Population Yearbook 2000–2020, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

More specifically, regarding childbirth patterns (see Figure 5.3), China shows the same type of converging demographic trend that Japanese society did in the early 2000s (Izuhara, 2006). Some couples have more than two or three children, whereas others have none. In contemporary China, at the national level, the fertility rate of having a second child witnessed a slight increase from the early 2010s with the implementation of two-child policies targeting different groups. According to the Seventh Census data in 2020, more than 50% of newborn babies are second children. In comparison, since the 2000s, there has been a continually decreasing number of women choosing to have a first child. From 2000 to 2020, China's two-child fertility rate rose by about 1.4% in the city and 0.5% in the village, respectively, but the one-child fertility rate dropped by 1.3% in both cities and villages over the same period.

Figure 5.3 Average Fertility Rate of Women at Childbearing Ages by the First Birth and Second Birth and by Region, 2000–2020



Source: China Population Yearbook 2000–2020, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

These national data reflecting the decreasing first-birth fertility rate and the increasing second-birth fertility rate reveal a contradictory phenomenon in contemporary China. The proportion of second children is increasing, but the average birth rate in China has experienced a year-on-year decrease. As Figure 5.3 shows, the Chinese modernisation process has not necessarily removed people's intentions, previously suppressed by the state's control, to have larger family sizes and more than one child. It also shows the emerging diverse preferences in fertility practices for people with the state's incremental retreat from birth control. Having a child is not always a universal choice for Chinese families.

Urban policy stakeholders have shared their working experiences and understandings of the continuity and changes in the fertility rate and people's fertility behaviours. They commonly highlighted the remaining impacts of strict implementation of the one-child policy on urban families' generally lower fertility rate compared with rural China. One key explanation for this is closely connected to the interaction between the aftermath of the one-child policy and the shifting parenting practices shaped by the market and the state. The national discourse about 'quality education' promoted during the implementation of the one-child policy was intended to suppress people's intention to have more children, particularly in urban China (Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005). Instead of investing fewer resources across more children, this state-led and market-driven discourse urges families to purchase more private tutoring classes and concentrate better educational resources on fewer children.

Under the interaction of a growing market for private tutoring services and state-led discourse about quality education, these socio-economic dynamics construct the close connection between higher educational attainment and more promising life stability in a competitive labour market. As suggested by the policy stakeholders from the Women's Federation, compared with rural China, urban China has experienced stricter birth control measures and a more profound privatisation process in these tutoring and private educational services. As a result, urban women still generally have a lower fertility rate for second birth than their rural counterparts (see Figure 5.3 above).

> People have gotten used to the lifestyle of only having one child. That is a kind of 'group memory' of the one-child policy for our generation. It is not easy to change the impact or the influence of the one-child policy: more quality education, tutoring resources and parenting time for the only child. The resources, the way and the time spent raising a child are no longer the same compared with ten years or twenty years ago. (Bo, Director of the Urban Women's Federation)

Another policy stakeholder from the Family Planning Office in the city holds quite a different view from that outlined above. Because of the strict birth control implementation in urban China, urban women seriously consider the risk of losing their only child and the difficulties that the child might face without sibling support. As a result, although the urban fertility rate for second birth is lower than that in rural China, it has grown faster and more aggressively.

> Some parents lost their only child due to accidents or diseases, which has caused great pain for these single-child families. These uncertainties brought by the one-child policy have reshaped their understanding of fertility and family risks. Urban residents have more passion than rural residents for having a second child after the two-child policy. (Ji, Director of the Urban Family Planning Office)

From the different perspectives on policy practices, policy stakeholders working in family welfare and family planning (population control) revealed varied opinions about women and their families' fertility intentions and practices in contemporary China. However, in stakeholders' narratives and the contemporary policy documents, women and their self-determination in fertility are rarely positioned in the central role but as passive actors following the family planning policies and complying with population strategies. With state intervention, fertility and childbirth are constructed as public affairs instead of personal and family decisions (more discussions about fertility decision making in section 7.1).

There are also coming with changes in working priority under these shifting population strategies. Policy stakeholders working in the family planning office and the Women's Federation interpreted their priorities and strategies that have been shifted from population and family planning to the public and social services provisions. With the implementation of the two-child policy, the family planning department has withdrawn from supervising and controlling people's fertility behaviours to have fewer children. For example, according to the Family Planning Officer working in Village L, their team have shifted their focus from enforcing the rules and monitoring people's fertility behaviours to providing services and welfare for family development. These services include rewarding single-child families[24] and providing regular reproductive health checks for women.

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[24] These rewards include providing extra pension support for single-child families in the city and daughter-only families in the rural areas (around £30 per month, depending on the local economic conditions) and annual visits and benefits (around £200 per year) for those who lose their only child.

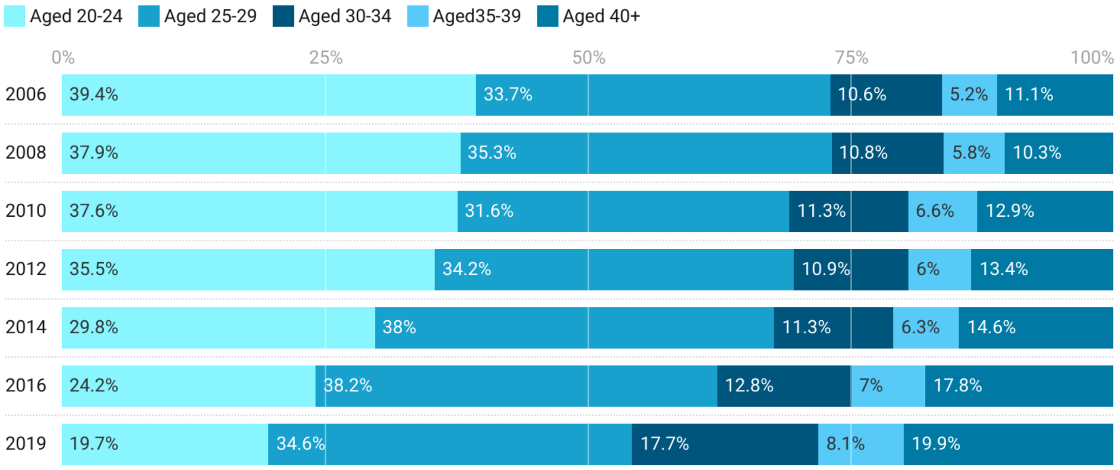
> In the past, 70% of family planning work was about managing and supervising fertility behaviours, and 30% was about providing service to the public. Nowadays, it is another way around. Our working aim was about 'family planning and controlling population', and currently, our working theme is about 'women's reproductive health and family support'. Then Chinese society could have more healthy children and young labour in the long term. (Hua, Director of the Rural Family Planning Office)

In contemporary China, population control is no longer part of the family planning policy paradigm. The services provided by the family planning department focus on ensuring women's reproductive well-being and fertility-relevant welfare support. Moving away from the narrative of 'population control' and 'population burden', this officer recognised that family planning nowadays mainly ensures women's reproductive well-being for long-term population growth and development. This transition in understanding fertility and population has reframed reproductive behaviours, emphasising the economic and social value of reproduction when it comes to providing more young labour force for the labour market in the future. Even with the changing services and priorities, there is still an unchanged principle in family planning policies and population strategies—namely, serving Chinese economic growth and national development.

5.1.2 Marriage and family formation: Continuities and changes

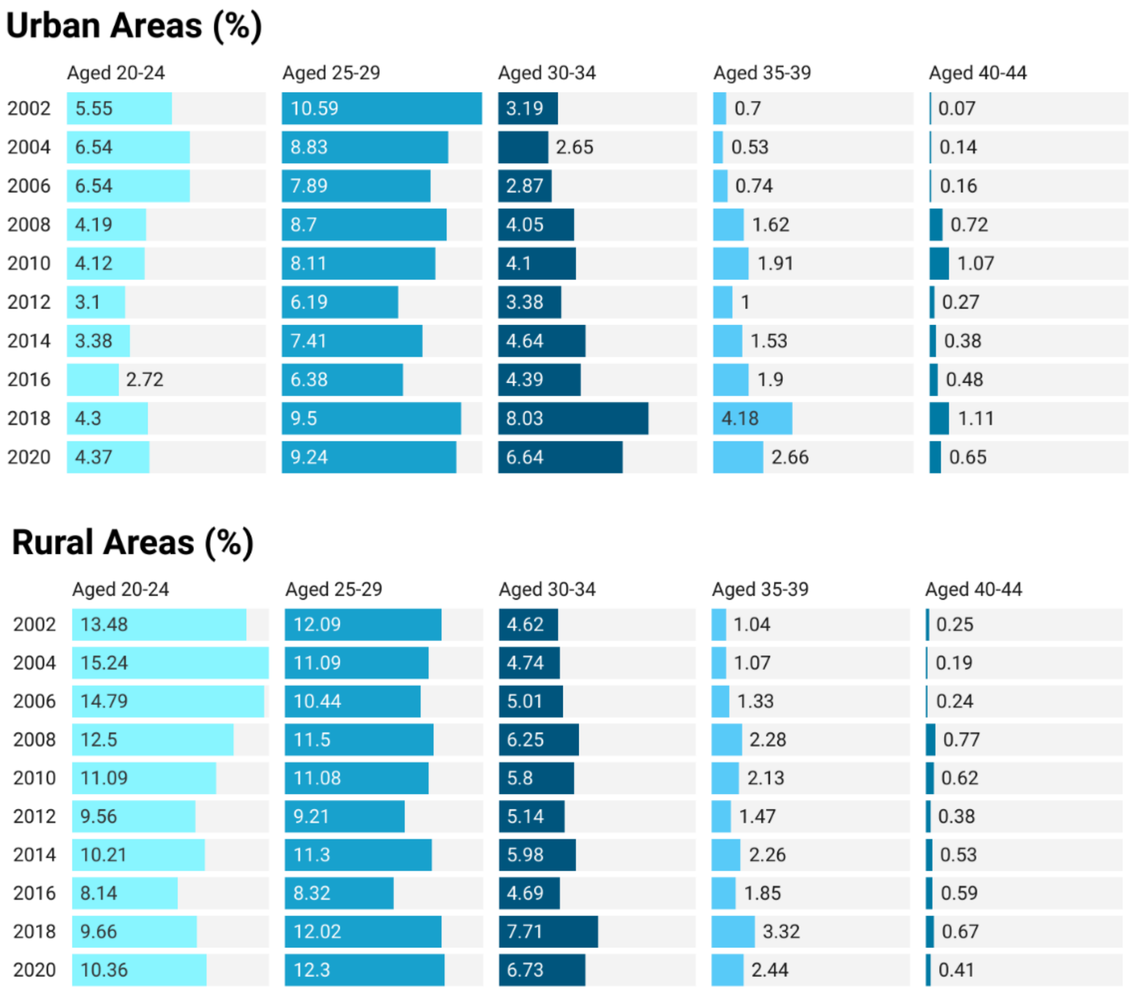
In the Chinese context, marriage, family formation and childbirth are closely related (Jia and Yu, 2019). From the mid-2000s to 2019, the proportion of registered marriages (including remarriages) of the cohort aged 20–24 years fell from around 39.4% to 19.7% and that of the cohort aged 25–29 years increased from 33.7% to 34.5% (see Figure 5.4). Those in the age cohort of 25–29 years have become the mainstream group for marriage registration. The proportion of marriage registrations among those aged 30 and above has witnessed a sharp increase in the last 15 years, doubling and reaching a proportion of 45% in 2019 (see Figure 5.4). These statistics from the China Population Yearbook demonstrate a trend of late marriage in contemporary China. In the context of late marriage, the fertility rate of those aged 20–24 has dropped accordingly (see Figure 5.5). The younger cohort is more hesitant to have a first child and delays the age of having a first child.

Figure 5.4 Marriage Registration by Age, 2006–2019



Source: China Population Yearbook 2006–2020, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

Figure 5.5 Fertility Rate of Women at Childbearing Ages by the Age of Mother and by Region, 2002–2020



Source: China Population Yearbook 2002–2020, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

Regarding spatial variations, the patterns of the age-specific fertility rate vary considerably between urban and rural areas. In urban areas, in the last two decades, the age cohort aged 25–29 years has been and continues to be the primary cohort with a higher fertility rate (10.59% in 2002 and 9.24% in 2020) compared with those aged 20–24 years (5.55% in 2002 and 4.37% in 2020). The fertility rate in these two age cohorts has not changed significantly. In contrast, in rural areas, the age cohort aged 25–29 years (12.3% in 2020) has gradually replaced that aged 20–24 years (10.36% in 2020) to become the primary cohort with a higher fertility rate. Overall, childbirth among the younger cohort in rural areas is higher than in urban areas, but these variations are decreasing slightly. With an evident fertility rate increase among those aged 30 years and over, there is a convergence in delayed childbirth in rural and urban areas.

According to the Women Representative working in Village L Committee, increasing years of education and late financial independence have affected women’s first childbirth, which is now later than it was in previous generations. Regarding policy changes, this stakeholder also discussed two influential factors—the delayed retirement age of the older generation and the privatisation of nursery services. The lack of childcare resources from the market and family makes the young generations more hesitant to enter parenthood.

> The lack of quality and affordable nurseries for young children and expensive education tutoring services, such and such have sacred people to have their first child when they are not financially independent or have time for these care responsibilities. Their parents’ delayed retirement age affects the young generation’s reproductive behaviours. (Li, Women Representative in the Village L Committee)

More shifting social and economic dynamics in the modernisation process, for example, changing lifestyles and financial adequacy, also become more significant in shaping marriage and family formation in contemporary China. Bo, the urban Women’s Federation director, interpreted delayed marriage and having a child as representing people’s changing understandings of childbirth and family. Having more choices in career development and witnessing the instability of marriage with an increasing divorce rate makes them feel less obligated to marry and have a child in their early 20s, although these two activities are still common and recognised as universal paths.

> The younger generation has more access to education, the Internet and updated information and thinks more independently about what they want. With more diverse lifestyles, the young generation is more cautious about when and how to enter marriage life and parenthood. (Bo, Director of the Urban Women's Federation)

With the interaction between the modernisation process and transforming family traditions, Chinese society is witnessing increasing variation in marital status and reproductive behaviour, with more alternative choices to traditional ones. As highlighted in the previous section, having children might not be practised as a compulsory life stage in contemporary China. At the same time, an increasing proportion of couples have more children after the removal of the birth-control policy. Like the changing and varied reproductive behaviours, although family formation through marriage is still the mainstream and in close connection to childbirth, there are declining marriage rates and increasing divorce rates; moreover, the gap between the two is trending towards convergence. The proportion of remarriages has also risen accordingly, increasing from 3.05% of the total number of registered marriages nationwide in 1985 to 5.1% in 1997, more than 10% in 2009 and 24.6% in 2019 (Civil Affairs Development Statistics Bulletin 2019; see also Table 5.2). The divorce-to-marriage ratio increased from 0.14 in 2000 to 0.53 in 2020, showing the declining stability of marriage and more diverse forms of family emerging.

Table 5.2 Crude Divorce Rate in China, 2000-2020 (‰)

Year	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Divorce Rate[25]	0.96	1.37	2	2.79	3.1
Marriage Rate	6.7	6.3	9.3	9	5.8

Source: Civil Affairs Development Statistics Bulletin 2020.

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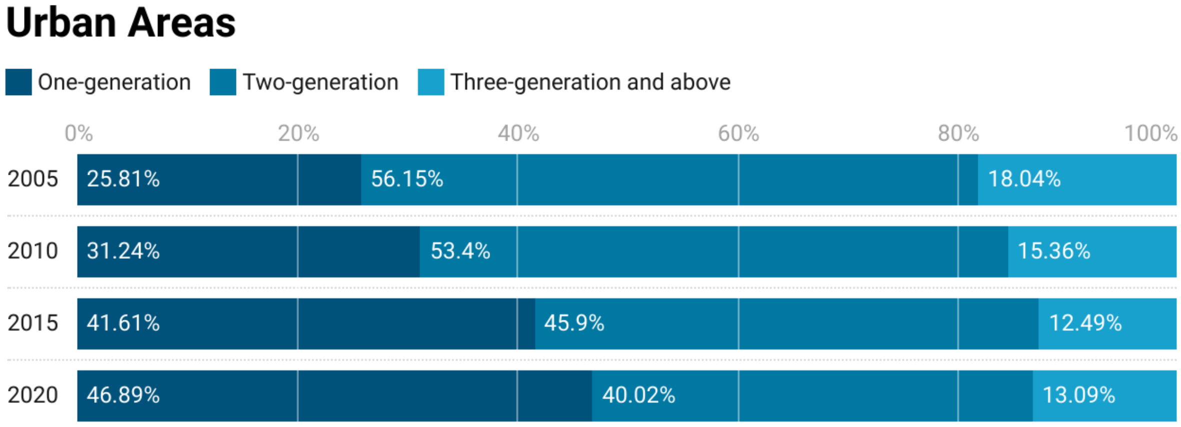
[25] The formula for divorce rate is (number of divorced pairs in a given year / average population in that year) x 1000 per thousand.

5.1.3 Living arrangements: Transforming family relations and resource exchanges

Beyond the changing forms of family and fertility behaviours, the smaller family size is associated with the shifting composition of the intergenerational living arrangement[26] among Chinese families. In contemporary China, one-generation[27] (47% and 42% in urban and rural China, respectively) and two-generation households (40% and 39% in cities and villages, respectively) are the primary household types and typical living arrangements. Similar trends in living arrangements can be seen across rural and urban areas, with an increasing proportion of one-generation households and decreasing proportion of two- and three-generation households (see Figure 5.6). However, the composition of household types is still different across rural and urban areas. For instance, the share of one-generation households, including single-person and couple-only households, was higher in urban areas (47%) compared with rural areas (42%) in 2020. In contrast, although both rural and urban areas share a similar proportion of two-generation households (39% and 40% in 2020, respectively), those with three generations in rural areas remained around 19% in 2020, at a proportion that was 6% greater than those in the urban areas. Generally, one-generation households are becoming increasingly common, whereas the proportion of two-generation households continuously decreases (see Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6 Intergenerational Living Arrangements by Region, 2005–2020



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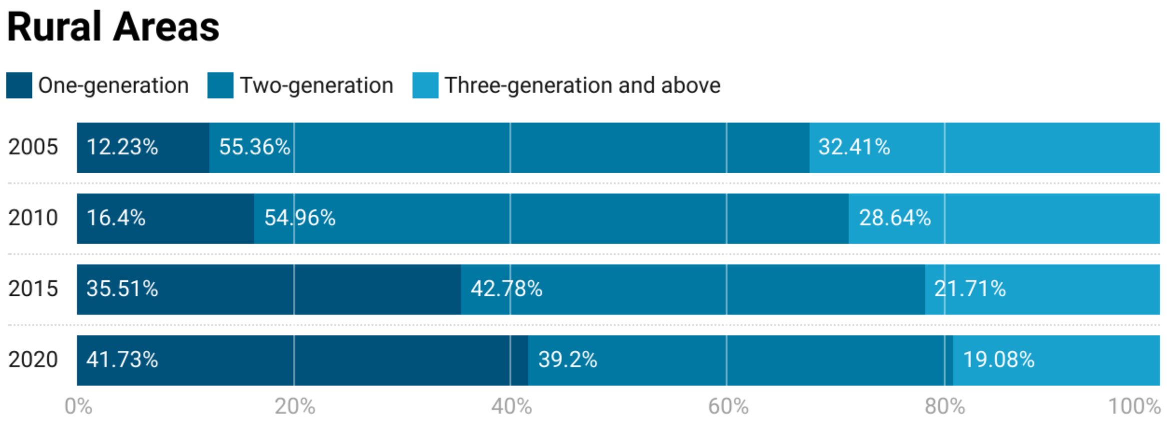
[26] One-generation household refers to the household in which a person lives alone, with others in the same generation (e.g., friends) or with a partner as a couple without children. A two-generation household includes single/partnered adults and their dependent child(ren) or older parents with their adult children. A three-generation household includes grandparents, parents and children living together.

[27] Unfortunately, the existing dataset did not distinguish the number of single-person and couple-only households among one-generation households.



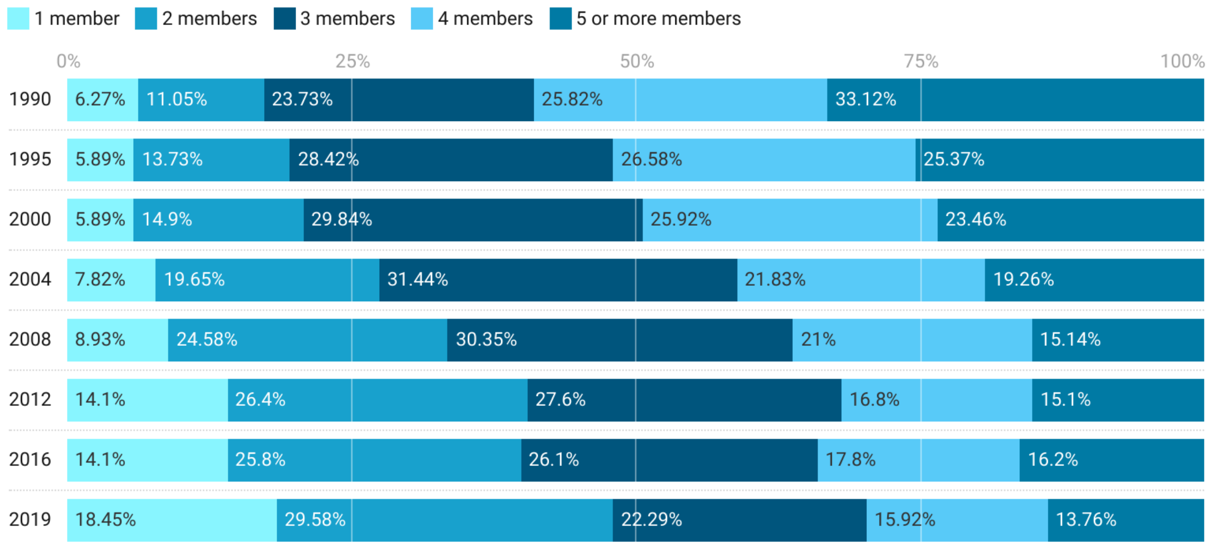
Source: China Population Yearbook 2005–2020, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

The pace of the changes occurring among different living arrangements also varies. In both regions, the changing scale in three-generation households is smaller than in the other two living arrangements. Within the changes between one-generation and two-generation households, the share of one-generation households has climbed the fastest and become the most typical family form in contemporary China. For three-generation households, compared with the shrinking in urban areas (from 18% to 13%), rural areas have experienced a more significant shrinking scale over the past 15 years (from 32% to 19%). Urban areas still have a higher proportion of one-generation households and a lower level of intergenerational co-residence than rural ones do. In contrast, rural areas have experienced a more significant transformation in different living arrangements and household types over the last decade.

As these statistics show, all forms of multi-generational co-residing are moving in the same direction or with similar speeds and scales towards a more independent family structure. Although the three-generation and above household type is not as common as the other household types, the slow and subtle decline in the share of three-generations and above households shows that co-residence and physical family support across generations still plays an important but not necessarily primary role in people's family lives. For the variations between rural (19%) and urban areas (13%) in 2020, those staying in rural areas were found to be more likely to live with and near their extended family and share family support because the allocated communal land and house are typically located nearby and maintained under the father's or son's name (also see more discussions in section 5.3).

More specifically, drawing on the Chinese Population Yearbook 2020, there are 125 million single-person households in China, a considerable size, accounting for more than 25% of the whole population (see Figure 5.7). Large household types with five people and above are no longer the primary household type in China; the rate of such households dropped significantly from 33.12% in 1990 to 13.76% in 2019. Instead, a small household with one to three people has been the main household type, occupying more than 70% of households in contemporary China. In these small household types, the proportion of single-person households has nearly tripled, increasing from around 6% to more than 18% over the last three decades. Although three-person households have experienced a slight drop in recent years, two- and three-person households are still two mainstream household types in contemporary China.

Figure 5.7 Household Types by Size, 1990–2019



Source: China Population Yearbook 2005–2020, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

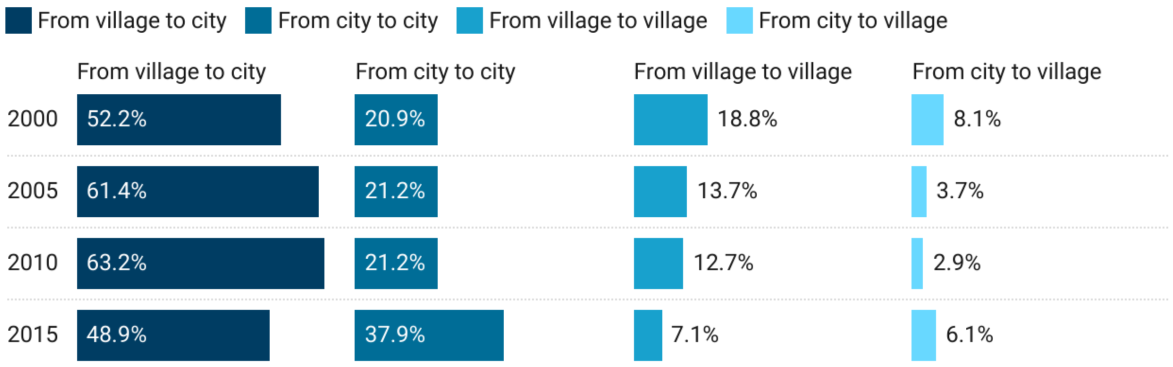
Chinese families are moving towards family nuclearisation, and although there are variations between cities and villages, such changes co-exist with the continued multi-generational co-residence. It appears contradictory to experience this slowly changed multi-generational co-residence when there is a rapid and significant increase in the proportion of one-generation households, a decrease in the proportion of two-generation households and the smaller family size (see Figure 5.1 in sub-section 5.1.1). These figures show that traditional family forms, including intergenerational co-residence and large family size, have been weakened by the Chinese modernisation process and population mobility. However, in an international context, multi-generational co-residence—as an important form of living arrangement in family practices among Chinese families (13.09% and 19.08% in urban and rural China, respectively)—remains high. For example, Japan has a rate of 4.19% three-generation households (Statistics of Japan 2020) and South Korea has a rate of 1.72% three-generation and above households (Korean Statistics Information Service 2020).

There are different rationales for the living arrangements across rural and urban China, which range from skipped-generational to intergenerational co-residence. The rural Women's Federation director shared her understanding of why these changes have occurred and the possible challenges for continuing intergenerational co-residence to share family resources. Generally, Fu suggested that the rapid increase in migration and population mobility across different regions has made intergenerational co-residence uncertain and less practical.

> Many young people go to the city to work and leave their children with their parents or in-laws back in the village. As a result, skipped-generation households are common in rural China. Take our village as an example; living with older parents is getting less practical because people want to move to towns and cities for better jobs and higher salaries, while the older generation prefers to stay in the community and environment they are familiar with. (Fu, Director of the Rural Women's Federation)

Before the Reform, because of the household registration system, people could only live and work in the same place where they were born. However, as highlighted in Chapter 2, sub-section 2.1.2, after the Reform in the 1980s, the government relaxed these restrictions in different forms, allowing rural residents to move to the urban areas and more affluent regions with more working opportunities. In 2020, the floating population comprised 26% of the Chinese population, nearly a 70% increase over the previous ten years (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020b). In recent years, the mobilisation types have also become more diverse, with more people mobilising between cities or from the city to the village (see Figure 5.8). Still, mobilising from rural to urban China is still the main trend. For most rural migrants living in the city, living nearby and closer to extended family, particularly parents, is becoming less practical. Population mobility has affected the family structure in rural areas because most rural migrants to cities are young people. This young labour outflow from the rural areas results in the skipped-generation household with leftover children, of which there were up to 12.9 million in 2020, and their grandparents or alone-living older people (empty-nest households) in the rural areas (China Education Yearbook Editorial Committee 2020).

Figure 5.8 Types of Population Mobility



Source: China Labour Yearbook Reports 2000-2015.

Regarding the families living in the city, policy stakeholders from the Urban Women's Federation discussed the complex and dynamic scenarios of how family members interact in addition to living arrangements and why. Compared with rural domestic migrant families, urban nuclear families are more likely to live nearer to their older parents instead of together and receive support from them. In urban China, smaller families and increasing numbers of one-generation households do not necessarily significantly erase close family support and solidarity traditions. Therefore, living arrangements might always be able to reflect the comprehensive and precise picture regarding the frequency and intimacy of family interactions. Bo, the director of the Urban Women's Federation, recognised the reduction in intergenerational co-residence among urban families because of the individualisation in private life and the financial pressure of purchasing a larger living space. However, different forms of family support continue.

> In the city, people live in flats with comparatively more crowded spaces. Also, the young generation and the older generation both want their own space and personal life. Particularly, the older generation wants a peaceful retirement life. However,

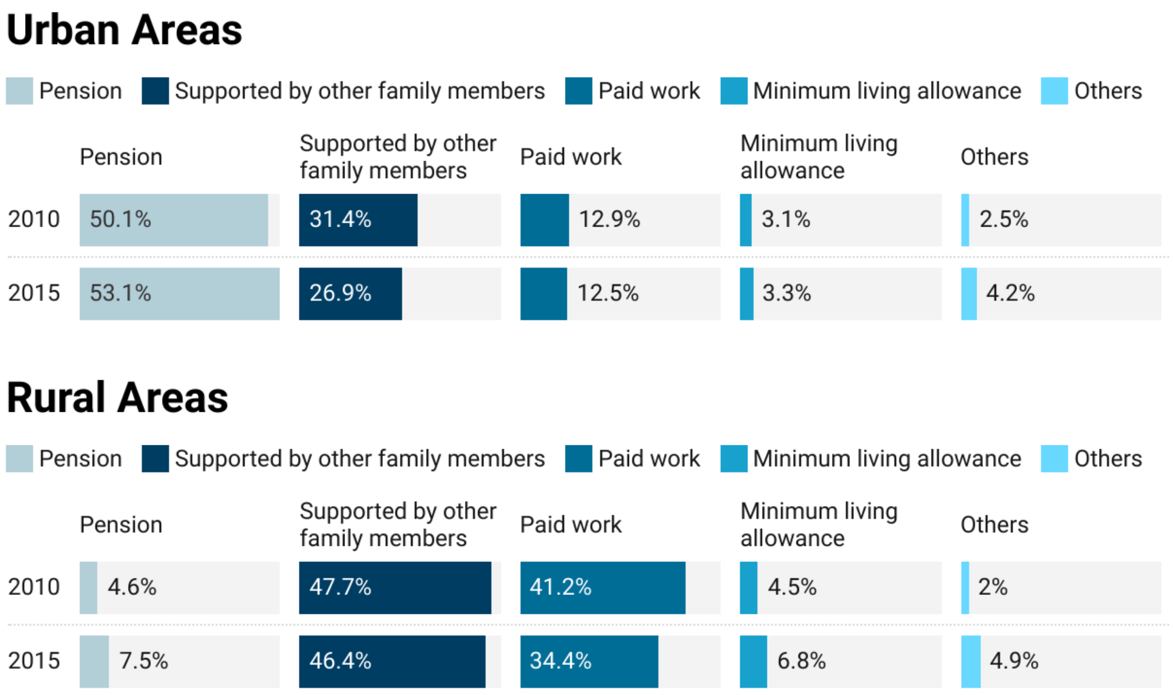
> though it is less common to live together under the same roof, it is still common for the extended family to eat together, support childcare, and visit each other regularly. (Bo, Director of the Urban Women's Federation)

With a focus on intergenerational co-residence in rural China, the Women Representative in the Village L Committee shared different opinions about why intergenerational co-residence is changing more slowly compared with other forms of living arrangements. Because of the low coverage rate in social security, rural residents who stay in the villages are more inclined to rely on their families after retirement.

> The retired villager can receive two types of income: one from the national pension insurance and another from the village benefits. For the national pension, rural residents can only buy rural medical and rural pension insurance, which gives very little money every month, about two hundred RMB [around 25 GBP] monthly for a retired adult. The coverage of pensions and benefits in rural areas is too low. That is why the family needs to hang on together to support each other, particularly the older parents. (Li, Women Representative in the Village L Committee)

In urban and rural areas, the gender gap between men and women regarding access to public pensions and medical insurance for non-working residents is generally erased. The pension and medical insurance inequality lies in the coverage and reimbursement rates between urban and rural areas. The coverage rate of public pensions in rural areas was around 32% in 2010. However, in urban areas, this coverage rate in the same year was 74%, double that in rural areas. For those aged 60 and above, more than half (53.1% in 2015) of the urban residents have a national pension as their source of livelihood, whereas only 7.5% of rural residents use their pension as their source of livelihood (see Figure 5.9). Thus, support is still the primary source of livelihood among rural residents, occupying up to 46% of this share and nearly 20% more than that in urban China.

Figure 5.9 Sources of Livelihood for Older Persons Aged 60 Years and Over by Region, 2010–2015 (%)



Source: 1% Population Census for 2015, 2010 Census data, National Bureau of Statistics.

As discussed above, rural and urban families generally have experienced a similar pattern of demographic transitions, such as the increasing share of one-generation households and a declining fertility rate since the early 2000s. However, the divisive welfare system interacts with family traditions and pulls back the possibility of developing more independent intergenerational relations among rural families. The interaction between the impact of the modernisation process on family traditions and the welfare system produces more contradictions and tensions between how people tend to live more independently and how family traditions have been continually practised in the context of uneven welfare provisions in rural and urban China. At national and macro levels, the Chinese family structure and formation have gradually been steering away from the traditional practices of lifelong marriage, large family size and intergenerational co-residence. These changes also reflect the multi-dimensional and fluid impact of Chinese modernisation on family practices. However, policy stakeholders' interpretations and working experiences discussed above show that the state still rarely explores alternative support and services to respond to the increasingly diverse family structures and changes in family needs.

5.2 The interaction between family, market and the state

5.2.1 Family virtues in an authoritarian approach: Social order and harmony

This sub-section examines the family traditions and virtues articulated under the socialist ideology in China. It sheds light on women's understanding and practices of family life, which are discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Previous studies, such as that of Sung and Pascall (2014), recognise Confucianism as the key factor for the policy practices prioritising families as welfare providers (see Chapter 2, sub-section 2.2.2). The state has reinforced and reinvigorated the relationships between the state and family unit and between personal choice and national responsibilities in transforming Confucianism (He and Wu, 2015). This process has emphasised the state's interests, family cohesion and societal stability regarding the social order. As a non-coercive measure, the CCP constructs a wide range of 'harmony' discourses via propaganda campaigns, moral awards issued by the government and neighbourhood supervision. Regarding family practices, harmonious family and relations among family members are labelled as illustrating the 'good family' and 'family virtues' in contemporary China.

Since the 18th Party Congress in 2012, there has been repeated emphasis on more than the importance of family support, but family education and family ethos, with public service announcements promoting harmonious relationships. These state-led discourses consolidate the social norms wherein harmonious family relations, as the mainstream, is recognised as a good tradition drawing from Confucianism. In the empirical data, most policy stakeholders also highlight the Confucian values of harmony, referred to as maintaining personal morals and cordial interpersonal relations in the past. They recognise family and community harmony as a renewal of this Confucian tradition that better regulates and complies with more supportive family relations and, as a result, a stable society and national prosperity. Their understandings and narratives have highlighted the importance of Confucianism as an important social norm and narrative in interpreting and implementing policy at the street level.

Fu, the director of the Women's Federation in Village L, expressed her understanding that "building a harmonious society and families are recognised as closely connected to and dynamically influencing each other". Especially, harmony in the family is based on the primary element of loyalty to the state. Attention is then drawn to peaceful and supportive family relations stemming from this. More than simply cultural values in Confucianism, these state-led family virtues related to harmony are embedded in an authoritarian approach, highlighting the contribution to society, obedience to the social order, patriotism, and loyalty to the Chinese Communist government.

> According to most family policy documents from the central government, good family virtues and harmonious families feature loyalty to the country, no criminal record and following family planning policy. These three are the core criteria. Then we assess the family through other perspectives, including good neighbourhood relations, harmonious conjugal relations, and supportive family relations. (Fu, Director of the Rural Women's Federation)

According to those stakeholders working for Family Planning Office and Women's Federation, when working for women and family welfare, stakeholders' services and activities must comply with and promote family virtues, ensuring consistency between policy documents and policy implementation at the street level. Socialist campaigns relate to how these policy stakeholders implement these state-led narratives and ensure the public complies with this state-building project related to a 'harmonious society and families'. Bo, the urban Women's Federation director, shared her experiences with launching socialist campaigns, such as the awards for 'the most beautiful family' (*zuimei jiating*, 最美家庭) and 'role model families' (*mofan jiating*, 模范家庭). In these annual campaigns, the Women's Federation assesses some families with outstanding performance in the workplace, community services and supporting family members with difficulties.

> In recent years, the central government has thought highly of family virtues as our Chinese traditions. Every year, we have a competition to select the families with good moral virtue and to play role models in influencing the neighbourhood, for example, those committed to work, passionate about volunteering, respecting the older generations and educating the younger generation with good standards. (Bo, Director of the Urban Women's Federation)

As argued in Chapter 2, although the state has retreated from family life in many ways after the Reform, the Chinese modernisation process is still state-led and under the supervision of the Communist government. Through these state-led and state-building narratives and propaganda campaigns, the state adopts an authoritarian approach to binding individuals' personal, family and national responsibilities and commitments together, particularly at the family and collective levels. The patriotism and family responsibilities underlined in these narratives and campaigns complement a wide range of conservative family policies and responses to the growing demands to maintain care relations and mitigate social risks. Instead of the state's responsibilities, individuals are expected to commit to and be responsible for addressing their personal and family issues by following these state-built family virtues and morals.

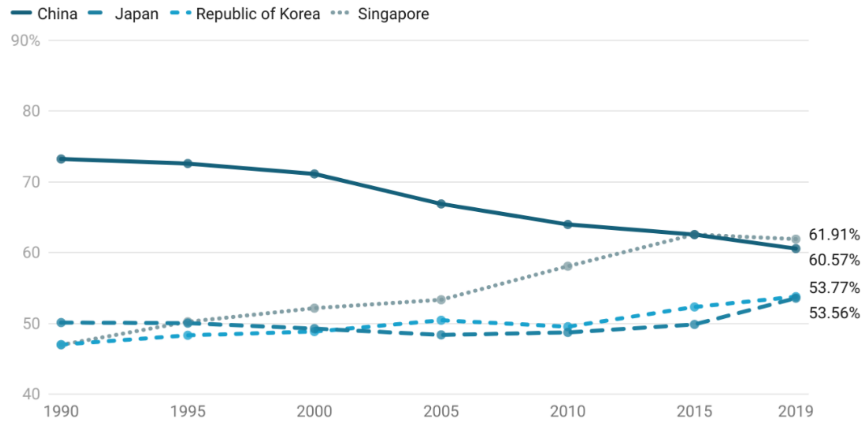
Re-constructing Confucianism as a state-transformation tool, the CCP integrates socialist values and patriotism to rehabilitate these Confucian traditions and repackage them as Chinese culture and social norms that have always existed. Confucianism comes back as a state-building project and penetrates individual and family life through these political propaganda and virtue campaigns. Consistent with Gow's (2017) arguments, these top-down narratives about personal virtues and moral ethics strategically adopt the well-entrenched Confucian values in the government's propaganda to align with people's familiar culture and values with less resistance. The state maintains conservative and authoritarian mechanisms in shaping stable family units and committed 'citizens' (member of society) as defined by the state's narrative, although the market economy has brought up a more liberal and capitalist ethos with the individualisation process (Yan, 2010). From a gender perspective, state-constructed Confucianism affects women's family life regarding intergenerational relations, parenting practices and gender roles and responsibilities as the daughter (in-law), mother and wife (see Chapter 7).

As highlighted in Chapter 2, Section 2.2, in the Chinese context, the debates about patriarchy not only involve the power dynamics between women and men but also among the state, civil society, family and individuals. Informed by the empirical data from stakeholders' interviews, the socialist campaign represents the enforcement of the state power on individual life and family relations. As a result, the state constantly reconfigures and attenuates the boundary between the public and private spheres, particularly by constructing role-model families and highlighting commitment to the Chinese Communist government as a prioritised family virtue. The co-construction and embeddedness of family and the state are evident in the transforming Confucianism that is promoted in the state and socialist narratives. These empirical data have shown that there are continuities in the state's control of family life, particularly in regulating family function, though the state has retreated from people's private lives in terms of universal welfare provisions and fertility control. In contemporary China, the importance of Confucianism lies in its role as an instrument for political leaders to reinforce and justify policies, laws and social norms. Family harmony steered by the state moves beyond highlighting the principle of the family as the primary welfare provider and linking the development of a harmonious and mutually supportive family as contributions to the national rejuvenation and the criteria for personal achievement in Chinese society, shifting attention and expectation to provide public welfare away from the state.

5.2.2 The prioritised paid work and formal employment in policy practices

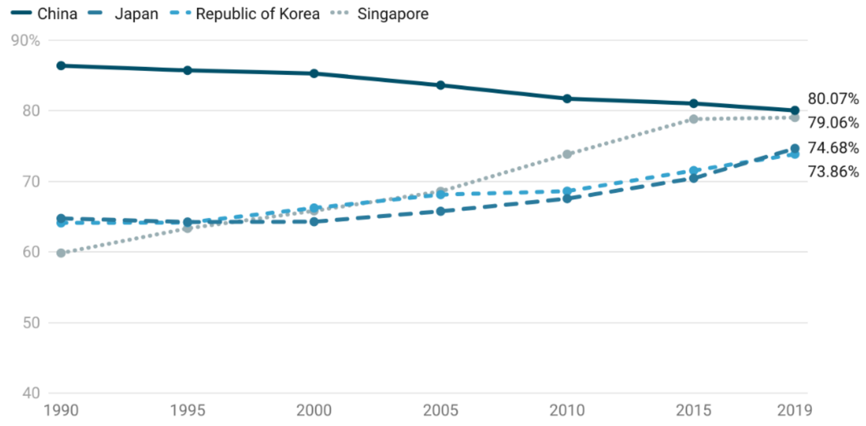
The Chinese welfare system has adopted work-first measures to ensure active labour market participation and disadvantage those outside the formal labour market. The official narrative enforces the necessity of re-entering the labour market as women's universal and socially expected choice. Although experiencing a continued drop from 74.24% in 1990 to 60.57% in 2019 (see Figure 5.10) in female labour market participation, contemporary China still features higher female participation than most East Asian countries. However, the gap between female and male labour force participation rates in other East Asian countries is narrowing in China, while this gap is continually widening, growing from 11.6% in 1990 to 14.8% in 2019 (see Figure 5.11).

Figure 5.10 Female Labour Market Participation Rate by Region, 1990–2019 (% of Female Population Aged 15+ Years)



Source: The World Bank Population Yearbook 2019.

Figure 5.11 Ratio of Female to Male Labour Force Participation Rates, 1990–2019



Source: The World Bank Population Yearbook 2019.

As part of the national economic strategies, the existing services of supporting women's work–life balance primarily prioritise paid work in the public sphere over unpaid care work in the private sphere. Bo, the director of the urban Women's Federation, interpreted that being financially independent can allow women to earn respect and equal treatment; this urges the woman to work and use paid work as a condition for self-determination. Meanwhile, in some policy stakeholders' understandings, engaging in unpaid care work at home is "not recognised as equally important to maintain a stable household finance as men's contributions in receiving (higher) salary income”. This assumption was often taken for granted when providing services and support for women. Bo commented,

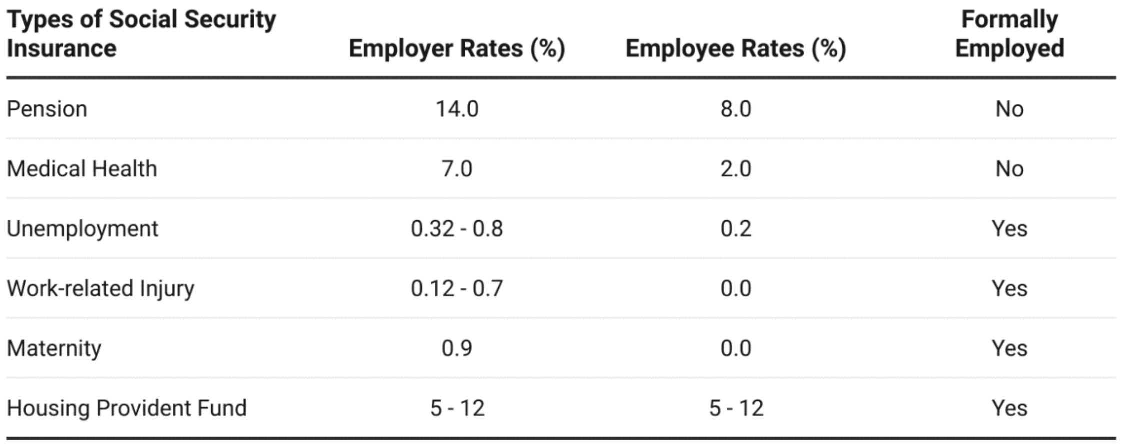
> The Women’s Federation has conducted different vocational pieces of training regularly. For example, last year, it conducted skill training for women to promote their employability in the labour market after being stay-at-home mothers. If women do not have paid work, they might be considered dependent at home, relying on their partner to maintain household finances. It is risky to do so. We often encourage women to get a (paid) job, no matter how. (Bo, Director of the Urban Women’s Federation)

In Village L, a similar assumption also exists. According to the front-line staff, Li, the Women Representative in the Village L Committee, paid work and the chance to work is equalised as forms of “emancipation of women”. From a financial perspective, paid work is recognised as a golden principle of practising gender equality. In contrast, unpaid care work is rarely discussed and valued in this context:

> As society develops, people do not merely rely on physical labour to make a living. Women can also be financially independent and release their potential. To some extent, women’s ability to live alone and independently has supported them to have an equal role and negotiate with their partners. It also explains that domestic violence is not as common as it was ten years ago. (Li, Women Representative in the Village L Committee)

The Chinese Social Security Insurance system also further reinforces these assumptions and understandings, perpetuating the prioritisation of paid work in practising gender equality. This system has created unequal treatment between working and non-working residents. Table 5.3 shows that those with formal employment status are better protected and supported under this divisive welfare system.

Table 5.3 Social Security Contribution in The Salary by Source And Employment Status: Guangzhou City as An Example[28]



Types of Social Security Insurance	Employer Rates (%)	Employee Rates (%)	Formally Employed
Pension	14.0	8.0	No
Medical Health	7.0	2.0	No
Unemployment	0.32 - 0.8	0.2	Yes
Work-related Injury	0.12 - 0.7	0.0	Yes
Maternity	0.9	0.0	Yes
Housing Provident Fund	5 - 12	5 - 12	Yes

Source: 2018 Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Labour and Social Security, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China.

Maternity insurance is closely related to women's fertility welfare. It provides basic medical services, maternity allowances and paid maternity leave (around 90–136 days) when pregnant workers temporarily interrupt their work because of childbirth. However, as part of the Employee Five Social Security Insurance, this insurance is only available for working women in the formal labour market. On average, employees with maternity insurance can receive more than £774 of financial compensation for the whole maternity leave period (see Table 5.4). Non-working mothers and those working in the informal labour market are excluded from this medical and financial support. Instead of providing more alternatives and support for women in different employment statuses, existing policy practices and front-line policy stakeholders have continually prioritised paid work and reinforced formal employment as a pre-condition to entitle women to adequate welfare support. The reiterated importance of female labour market participation reveals the state's productivist ethos and techniques to urge people to prioritise paid work.

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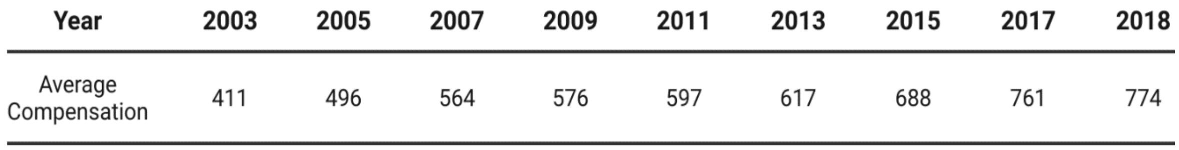
[28] 'Employer rate' is the percentage of wages that employers are required to contribute to this type of Social Security coverage. 'Formally Employed' refers to whether this type of coverage requires formal employment status prior to enrollment.

Table 5.4 Average Maternity Compensation for Insured Workers Per Person, 2003–2018 (£)



Year	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2018
Average Compensation	411	496	564	576	597	617	688	761	774

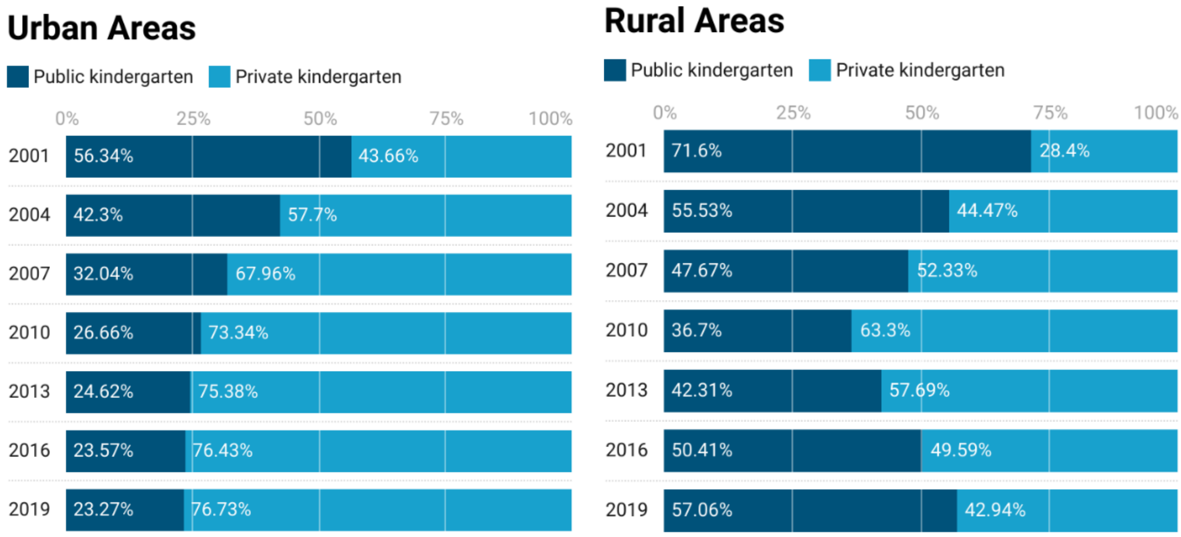
Source: 2003–2018 Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Labour and Social Security, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China.

5.2.3 Marketising childcare services: The retreat of the state

Childcare services are a crucial institutional dynamic in understanding women's situations in relation to their paid work and care arrangements. Nursery refers to childcare services for those aged under three years. Characteristics of nurseries are not included in the official statistics collected by the National Bureau of Statistics because childcare services are not counted as education in China. With the state's retreat from universal welfare after the Reform, most nurseries are currently run by private institutions that do not receive funding from the government. Thus, the nurseries are filtered out of the government's responsibilities, leaving childcare services for children under three years old in a vacuum. In the policy document and the official statistics, pre-school education services in China, targeting those aged between three to six, are mainly referred to as kindergartens. Kindergartens are the main institution taking the pre-school education role.

After the economic reform in the 1980s, SOEs and the public sector gradually withdrew from the publicly funded preschool education service. As a result, the structure of this pre-school education has experienced a dramatic change, such that there are more private institutions than public ones. From the early 2000s, an increasing number of private kindergartens entered the market and gradually took over the main proportion of pre-education services. According to the Ministry of Education, the average share of publicly funded kindergartens has shrunk significantly, from 75.71% in 1987 to 37.84% in 2018. In urban areas, the proportion of private kindergartens increased from 44% in 2001 to 78% in 2019. In rural areas, the corresponding proportion increased from 28% in 2001 to 43% in 2019 (see Figure 5.12). Compared with families living in rural areas, urban families may find it more difficult to send their children to publicly funded kindergartens because of a lack of availability.

Figure 5.12 Kindergarten by Funding Source, 2001–2019



Source: China Education Statistics Yearbook 2000–2019, Ministry of Education.

Among young children aged under three years, only around 4% were enrolled in private nurseries in 2019. Families that cannot afford childcare services in private nurseries face an obstacle to accessing quality childcare service resources. In addition, some families might choose to defer their children's entry into kindergartens because the share of publicly funded kindergartens has decreased, making kindergarten less available for many families with a limited budget. The lack of affordable private childcare services in nurseries and a limited number of public-funded kindergartens for young children might make those women with limited financial resources and low-paid jobs more hesitant about returning to full-time paid work and paying for this private childcare and pre-education services. As the Statistics of Bureau calculated, in 2022, Chinese families, on average, spent up to £2,700 per year on childcare services for children between 0 to 2. This figure might vary across rural and urban areas. However, as highlighted in sub-section 5.2.2, labour market participation is often prioritised and recognised as an essential source of women's self-determination and fundamental family strategy to maintain stable household finance in existing policy practices and narratives. Under the state's retreat, the privatisation of childcare and pre-school education services has brought more challenges for women to maintain care relations, paid work and careers with limited choices. How the interactions between the absence of public welfare and the marketisation process affect women's care arrangements in everyday lives will be further explored in Chapter 6.

5.3 Gender justice under transforming Confucianism and modernisation

Previous Section 5.2 has highlighted the interaction between the family, market and the state in shaping role-model family practices complied with the state's interests, the universal and institutionalised labour market participation and limited public resources in childcare services. Drawing on interviews with policy stakeholders and the secondary data, this section continues the discussions of these social, institutional and economic dynamics that elaborate on their implications in shaping the broad picture of the practices of gender justice in the labour market, family and the state. The data has informed the discussions of the dimensions of social integration and equal values that, from a national perspective, focus on the individual-state-market relationship and its implications on Chinese families' care and paid work arrangements.

5.3.1 Paid work and family life: The constructed incompatibility

Sub-section 5.2.2 has elaborated on the construction of paid work and formal employment as universal practices reinforced by the employment-based social security system. However, more statistics and stakeholders' working experiences show that female labour market participation is not as straightforward as in previous assumptions. This sub-section discusses the unregulated and ambiguous protections for employees in the labour market and how these dilemmas reshape the incompatibility of paid work and family life in contemporary China.

The front-line staff in the Women's Federation and Family Planning Office often describe China as "a society governed by the rule of law". If a company breaks the law and violates women's rights as written in the law, these policy stakeholders can support and protect these women by using the Labour Law. However, some unwritten work ethics and cultures in day-to-day working life are not necessarily illegal because the existing Labour Law does not always cover these issues with enough detail and specifications. For example, the culture of long working hours is common in the competitive labour market, making paid work and family life increasingly incompatible in contemporary China. Lawyer Wu, also a legal consultant with expertise in family and employment policy, commented,

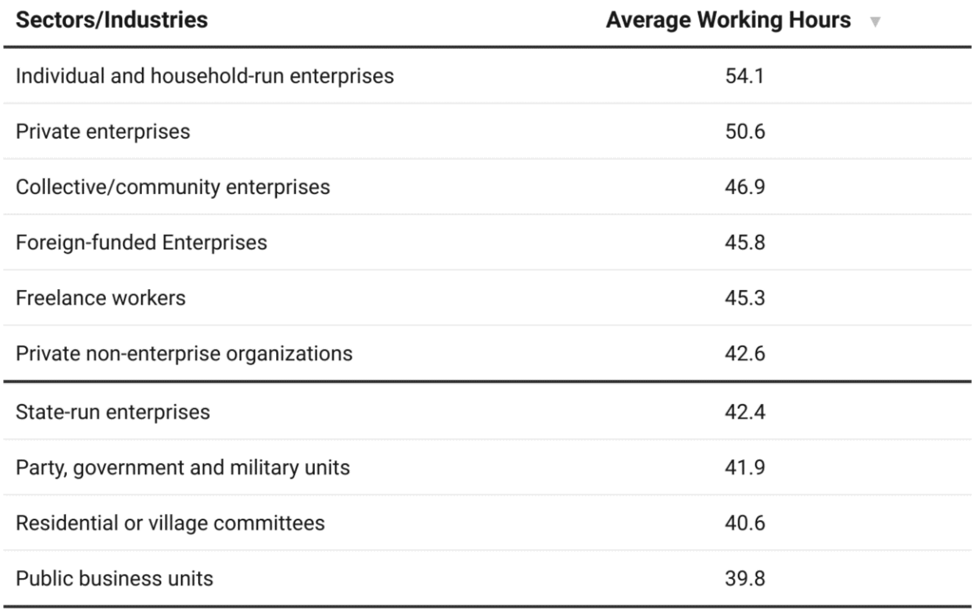
> Law and regulations are always a step behind the changes happening in society. For example, some women say they are discriminated against in the workplace because they do not want to work overtime. However, in existing law and labour regulations, overtime is not always illegal as long as they provide financial compensation. If these women did not want to work overtime, they might receive verbal bullying from other work colleagues and employers, which is less likely to be proven and hard to follow. (Wu, Legal Consultant in the Urban Government Legislation Committee)

Expectations of working overtime hours, gender discrimination and demotion because of childbirth are examples of labour conventions that exploit employees. These situations are vaguely covered by the law as illegal and are often not monitored properly by the state. These ambiguities about working ethics and cultures make having paid work more incompatible with family responsibilities when intensive working hours and workload overwhelm the employee. These under-regulations and the state's lack of supervision in the labour market create a second layer of inequality and exclusion for women who want to work in the labour market and achieve work–life balance. Some policy stakeholders also find it challenging to help women fight for their rights regarding gender discrimination and coercion to work long hours in the workplace. For example, Bo commented,

> We sometimes receive complaints that the employer is not paying enough salary after firing the employees. This is illegal, and it is easier to follow and pass it to the lawyer and the Labour Bureau. In some situations, women complain that they get verbally bullied and demoted because they do not want to work overtime. Alternatively, they have been assigned to a junior position after maternity leave. However, the existing laws and regulations regarding overtime and demotion are ambiguous. I know that people work overtime in big companies and cannot take time off whenever they want. These are unwritten traditions in most workplaces, particularly private companies. (Bo, Director of the Urban Women's Federation)

However, there are variations between different sectors and industries in the Chinese state-led market economy. Particularly, under stricter state supervision, women in the public sector receive more protection in guaranteeing the total working hours (Wu et al. 2016). Working hours and workload per week, in general, represent another two critical differences between the labour markets in the public and private sectors (see Table 5.5 and Figure 5.13). Standardised and regulated working hours are more commonly implemented in the public sector. In contrast, private companies might not necessarily follow all these rules in managing overtime and extremely long working hours (without full pay).

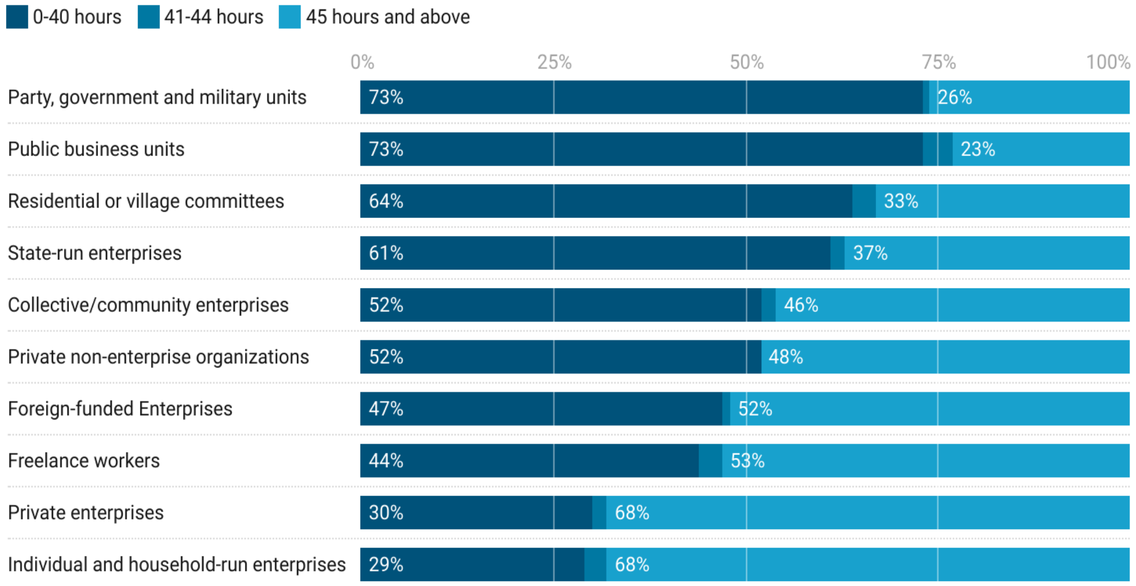
Table 5.5 Average Working Hours by Sector/Industry, 2015 (hours/week)



Sectors/Industries	Average Working Hours ▼
Individual and household-run enterprises	54.1
Private enterprises	50.6
Collective/community enterprises	46.9
Foreign-funded Enterprises	45.8
Freelance workers	45.3
Private non-enterprise organizations	42.6
State-run enterprises	42.4
Party, government and military units	41.9
Residential or village committees	40.6
Public business units	39.8

Source: China Labour-force Dynamics Survey 2015, Sun Yat-sen University.

Figure 5.13 Working Hours Per Week by Sector/Industry, 2015

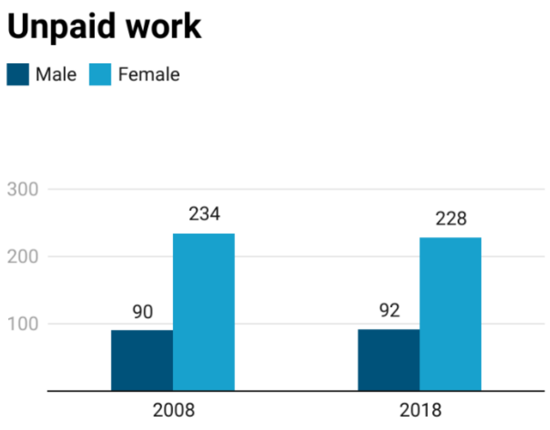


Source: China Labour-force Dynamics Survey 2015, Sun Yat-sen University.

Regarding unpaid work and time use in family life, women generally have more unpaid work and less free time than men (Cook and Dong, 2011; Dong and An, 2015). In the China Time Use Survey, unpaid work includes household work (food preparation, cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, pet care, general household plans and arrangements), childcare, elderly care and general care for the extended family. China Time Use Survey data collected in 2008 and 2018 show the variation in the average time spent on unpaid care work and paid work between women and men. There are not many differences in women's time spent on unpaid care work, at 234 minutes in 2008 and 228 minutes in 2018 (see Figure 5.14 below). Men spent around 90 minutes on unpaid care work in both 2008 and 2018.

In the private sphere, the contribution of unpaid work at home is still unequal and unbalanced between women and men. These data show that women have continued to take on a similar amount of care workload in the last decade in the context of a competitive labour market with long paid working hours. These time-use inequalities at home can further exacerbate the gender gap in time and resources to spend on women's and men's career development. In addition, the unchanged gap between men and women and unchanged time spent on unpaid work means that family members, particularly women, are continually taking most of the care responsibilities that are still not shared by both their partners and, more importantly, other public or social services outside the family.

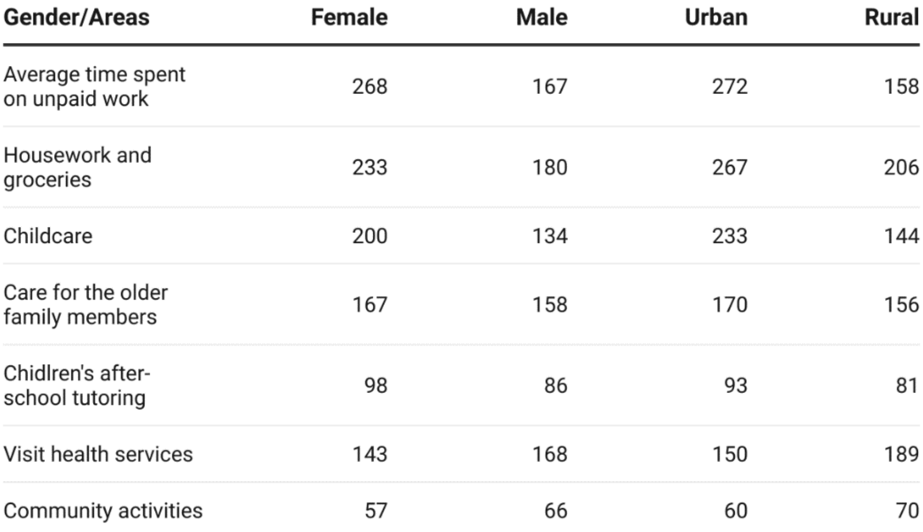
Figure 5.14 Time Spent on Unpaid Work by Gender, 2008–2018 (mins/per day)



Source: China Time Use Survey 2008 and 2018, National Bureau of Statistics.

More specifically, as shown in Table 5.6 below, females spend more time on childcare and housework than their male counterparts, while they share similar time spent on care for older family members. It highlights the manifestation of the mother's role of undertaking most childcare responsibilities and the gendered division of labour of childcare and adult care within the family. Drawing on the time use data in 2018, it is also worth noting that urban residents spend more time on childcare than rural residents in general. It might be relevant to a larger family network, and rural residents can share childcare with a wider and close enough network. This is also the findings supported by Cong and Silverstein (2012) and Liu (2014), explained by the resilience and flexibility of family support among rural families. These are the details about spatial variations that will be explored in the following chapters through rural and urban mothers' lived experiences in access to family support.

Table 5.6 Unpaid Work Time by Gender and by Region among Respondents at Average,[29] 2018 (mins/week)



Gender/Areas	Female	Male	Urban	Rural
Average time spent on unpaid work	268	167	272	158
Housework and groceries	233	180	267	206
Childcare	200	134	233	144
Care for the older family members	167	158	170	156
Chidlren's after-school tutoring	98	86	93	81
Visit health services	143	168	150	189
Community activities	57	66	60	70

Source: China Time Use Survey 2018, National Bureau of Statistics.

The statistics from the China Family Panel Survey 2012–2018[30] reveal why women in different age cohorts have chosen not to enter the labour market and to stay unemployed. Compared with the whole workforce group aged 16–60 years, women in their 20s and 30s were more likely to mention household responsibility as the main reason for being unemployed at the moment. These data show that women might face more changes in their employment status and career decisions after having a young child, generally in their 20s and 30s (see Figure 5.15). Male counterparts are less likely to stay unemployed because of household responsibilities. These statistics and stakeholders' working experiences show an interactive process in women's challenges in balancing care and paid work are shaped by a competitive labour market with gendered working ethics and unpaid work disproportionately shared by women. Indeed, the labour market in the public sector is better regulated and supervised by the state. However, in general, long working hours, workplace discrimination, and intact household responsibility have constructed the incompatibility of paid work and care work and reproduced more challenges for Chinese women to maintain work–life balance in most sectors and industries.

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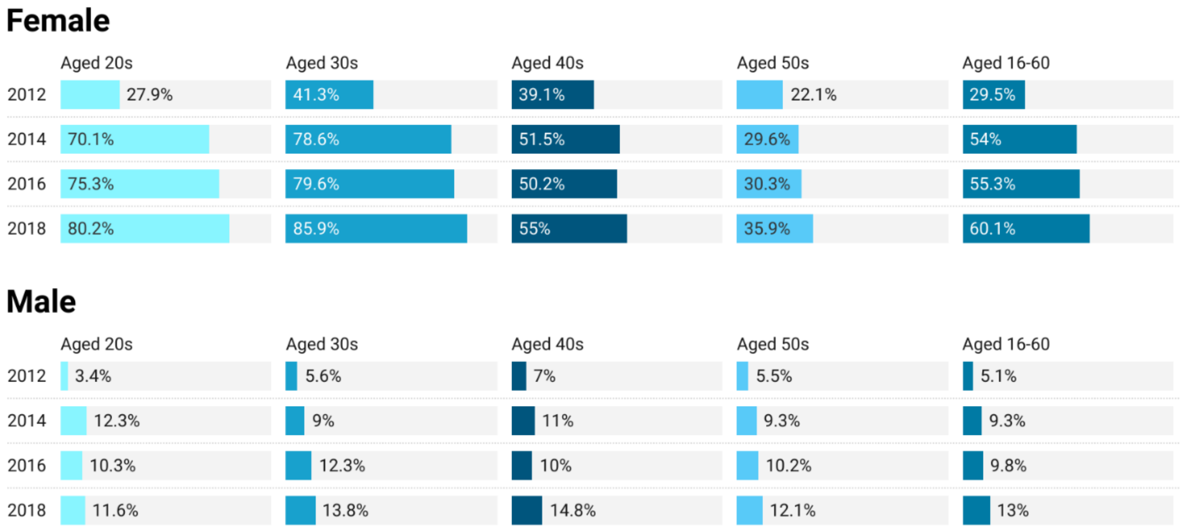
[29] Time at average refers to the sum of all time spent on a particular type of activity divided by the total number of survey respondents. The average time of a day for all respondents is obtained by weighting the data on weekdays and rest days by 5/7 and 2/7, respectively.

[30] In the China Family Panel Survey, the research team listed several reasons for not entering the labour market, including *don't need a job/don't want to work*; *household responsibility*, such as giving birth, taking care of

Figure 5.15 Proportions of Respondents Choosing 'Household Responsibility'' as the Reason for Staying Unemployed by Age Group and Gender



Source: China Family Panel Survey 2012–2018, the Institute of Social Science Survey of Peking University, China.

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children, and doing housework; *retired*; *can't work due to illness/disability*, *can't find an appropriate job* and *still in school*.

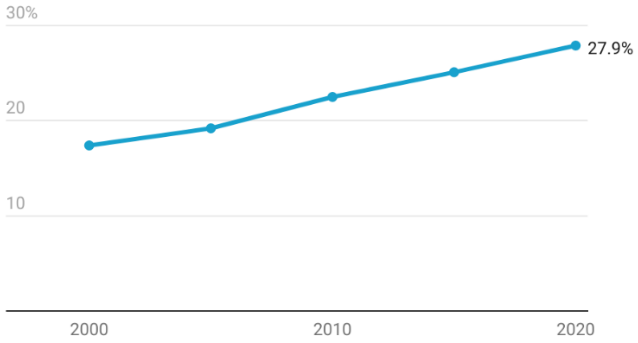
5.3.2 The reshaping and re-interpretation of socialist gender justice

As discussed in sub-section 5.2.2, policy stakeholders and documents often recognise paid work along with financial independence, as one of the most important manifestations of gender equality. Drawn on policy stakeholders' shifting understandings and policy practises, this sub-section further explores and expands the discussions of other aspects of gender equality and justice and how they are reshaped and re-interpreted in a top-down approach. Under the socialist ideology, gender justice has been understood and practised differently between China's public and private spheres. The director and officer of the urban Women's Federation interpreted proportional equality between men and women, including a higher proportion of female leadership and female employees in the workplace, as an essential step to practising gender justice. They commented:

> Personally, I think China has done well to ensure the proportion of female leadership in the government, ensuring women receive respect in the working unit. Therefore, I do not feel women have weaker working abilities than men. (Bo, Director of the Urban Women's Federation)
>
> In the government, we all need to ensure a certain proportion of female employees and female leadership. If there is no such rule in the public sector, how can women enter politics and reach a senior role in the public sector? Without this national policy imposed by the government, women will have much weaker power to fight for their rights in Chinese society. (Luo, Officer of the Urban Women's Federation)

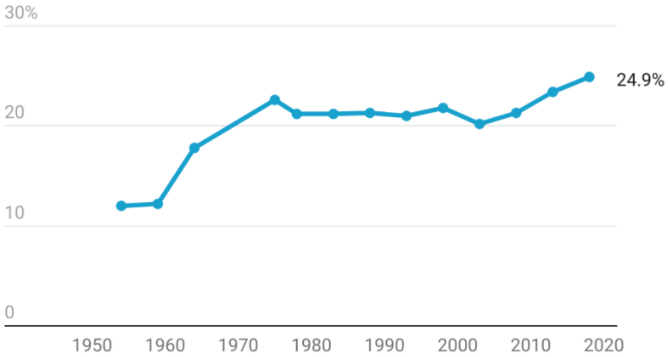
According to these policy stakeholders, the prevalent policy narrative of 'proportional justice' (*bili gongping*, 比例公平) highlights gender justice through an equal or similar proportion of women and men in educational attainment, hiring, pay, promotion, economic and political participation in the public sphere. This narrative of 'proportional equality' has used men as a reference standard to empower women and in policy practices, as long as women's participation and representation rates are similar to males. As the urban Women's Federation director discusses, the women's representative emphasised that there must be women candidates, typically 30%, in village elections. Also, regulated by the government, the female staff rate or female leadership, up to 30%, is an important indicator for work units and companies to be eligible for the annual awards appraising socio-economic contributions to society. This top-down interpretation and practice of justice are safeguarded via the strict implementation of government regulations. The female membership rate in the Communist Party has increased from 17.4% to 27.9% in the last two decades (see Figure 5.16). There has also been a significant increase in the female representative rate in the National People's Congress, which more than doubled in the last generation, increasing from 12% in 1954 to 24.9% in 2018 (see Figure 5.17).

Figure 5.16 Female Membership Rate in the Communist Party, 2000–2020



Source: Status of Women in China Yearbook 2020, State Council Working Committee on Women and Children.

Figure 5.17 Female Representative Rate in National People's Congress, 1954–2018



Source: Status of Women Yearbook 2020, State Council Working Committee on Women and Children.

However, this '30% principle' has also presented a one-sided scenario of women's situation with a numerical myth. Generally, the public has limited self-determination when it comes to participating in the policymaking process in the Chinese political system. As a one-party state, China defines its political power within the CCP and the central government. Thus, women are often in a passive position with limited self-determination in the policymaking process. This form of proportional equality and justice is often limited to the junior role in the public sector. For example, as the Women Representative in the Village L Committee commented: women are less likely to compete for a senior role.

> In village elections, the government has a strict regulation that up to 30% of people in the team should be women and women are expected to win the election and get elected in a specific role. However, women normally do not sign up to compete for more senior roles, like the secretary and the village leader. So it is always men who take these senior and important roles. (Li, Women Representative in the Village L Committee)

These forms of equality are mostly kept within the public sphere, particularly in politics and the labour market of the public sector. The impact and intervention of the government and policy stakeholders are less influential in the private sector and people's everyday lives in the private sphere. These private spheres are recognised as hidden and ambiguous aspects that policy and socialist governance cannot effectively reach. Policy stakeholders find that people prefer following social norms, cultural values and traditional habits in the private sphere. One of the rural Women's Federation directors recognises that in rural areas, the unchanged traditional cultural values and gendered roles at home are a tough challenge for achieving gender justice in contemporary China.

> In the public sphere, the government can strictly guarantee and regulate gender equality in work units. However, we can not do the same things to people and regulate how they should live their family lives. Family life in the village is a very private and personal corner. (Fu, Director of the Rural Women's Federation)

Another stakeholder, Mei, the director of the urban Women's Federation, used the term 'relative justice' (*xianngdui gongping*, 相对公平) to describe the situations of practising gender justice in contemporary China. The practices of gender justice between the public and private spheres are not consistent. For instance, higher proportions of female leadership and female labour market participation in the public sphere co-exist with the slowly changing gendered role and traditional cultural values in the private sphere. These interpretations and practices of gender justice are part of the public sector in the public sphere. Women's 'sky' has been held up in public, but the private 'sky' has not changed significantly. The divide between public and private has implied the inconsistency and paradox of understanding and practising gender justice in contemporary China.

> I will say that gender justice in China is a kind of 'relative justice'. Whether there is gender justice depends on which aspects and spheres you are looking at. When women come back home from work, they usually have to do most housework. This situation is unequal. No matter how equally they are treated in the workplace and in women's political leadership, women still seem to have more family responsibilities. Our work can not and would not intervene in how these couples should share their family responsibilities because that is their family, private and personal businesses, not part of the state's intervention. (Mei, Director of the Urban Women's Federation)

These stakeholders' experiences show that the relative and proportional justice constructed by the state in the public sphere does not seem to be as influential as expected when it comes to challenging the gendered roles and gendered division of labour at home in the private sphere. Instead, their working experiences reflect the state's role of retreating from family life in a certain way, which justifies the absence of public assistance and welfare in supporting and valuing care relations. As discussed in previous Chinese literature (Yang and Yan, 2017), whichever policy narrative and practices of women's role are considered, the focus on the public sphere and prioritising national development over individual needs remain consistent. In contemporary China, for women, the sky they are holding is the sky in employment and political participation in the public sphere, and also limited to the public sphere, the power they are establishing is the power in these dimensions exclusive from family and social reproduction activities. These policy narratives and practices are re-interpreted into the hierarchy and orders of gender justice between the public and private spheres. From a micro perspective, how women's lived experiences are manifested, reflected and contradicted under these policy narratives and practices will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

5.3.3 Transformation and penetration between public and private patriarchy

This sub-section discusses how the state potentially integrates Confucian traditions in policy practices and brings up the manifestation of the penetration from public to private patriarchy. Previous sub-section 5.2.1 has discussed how the state imposed the public patriarchy by constructing a 'harmonious family' across national narrative and socialist campaigns. According to the lawyers' working experiences, the quest to maintain a 'harmonious family' turns into more patriarchal practices in the family, which urges women to address their family conflicts in private instead of going through formal mediation. Wu, the lawyer and consultant for the government legislation committee in the urban area, pointed out that to remain a 'harmonious family', many women do not have enough initiatives and agency to address their family conflicts even though they have the legal right to do so. The transforming Confucianism emphasises harmonious family has justified women's reaction to containing these conflicts within the family rather than exposing them in the public sphere through the legal process.

> The most common challenge is that women find it difficult and shameful to expose their traumatised experiences in family conflicts or show their intention to divorce. This process requires women to have much bravery to overcome traditional cultural values or social norms that request women to manage a 'harmonious family' as a kind of glory. In most cases, they are less willing to collect evidence (of domestic violence and cheating) and expose family issues through the legal process due to the 'shame'. As a result, they are more disadvantaged when it comes to safeguarding their rights. (Wu, Legal Consultant in the Urban Government Legislation Committee)

According to the policy stakeholders working in the village, women in rural areas have to face more traditional values and unequal regulations that reinforce gendered roles and the inequality between women and men. Hua, the director of the rural Family Planning Office, interpreted that in rural areas, gender equality is more like an official and superficial narrative because of these unchanged regulations.

> In rural areas, if the first child is a daughter, then the couple can have a second child. Many people wonder why it is the case; if you say that men and women are equal, there is a distinction between having a daughter and a son. Personally, this does not match the principle of gender equality. The policy allows people to have only one son,

> whereas two daughters follow and reinforce people's son preference and justify this social norm. (Hua, Director of the Rural Family Planning Office)

The family planning policy has created a contradiction between promoting gender equality and the differences between having a daughter and a son, as defined by the policy. These understandings of the differences between having a daughter and a son in terms of fertility behaviours have justified and validated people's traditional values in their gendered roles and son preference. This constructed difference between daughters and sons interacts with the village benefit allocation and household registration systems in rural areas, reinforcing traditional social norms in rural families. The local regulations in the rural area prioritise men as the head of a family and their property rights. Women still do not have the right to inherit the communal land and village benefits once they are married. Gender inequality, including son preference and male-head household registration, is continuously justified and reinforced by village regulations. Meanwhile, Fu, the director of the Women's Federation Village L, also pointed out that women are more likely to lose their property, financial income, and land bonuses once their marriages break down.

> In rural China, women's property right is based on the condition of marriage, which puts a divorced woman in a passive position in claiming her rights and benefits within the household led by either her ex-husband or ex-father-in-law. I have seen many cases when women get divorced and lose most land and financial benefit from the communal land. These unequal treatments in village rules often make women less determined to get divorced, even though some have had a bad marriage. (Fu, Director of the Rural Women's Federation)

These stakeholders' working experiences elaborate on an interacting process in which the state's intervention in family relations, distinguished family planning policies and the unchanged rules in rural China turn into more forms of patriarchal practices in family life in the private sphere. This process has also shown the penetration of public patriarchy into private patriarchy in family lives through policy practices and narratives under an authoritarian approach (see more discussions in Chapter 7, sub-section 7.1.3). Unlike the socialist gender justice practised limited to the public sphere, the state has transformed patriarchal norms and practices from the public to the private sphere across different dimensions of family life.

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed a mixed picture of women's socio-economic status from the perspectives of national statistics, policy documents, stakeholders' interpretations, and their working experiences. There has been a departure from the standard family unit in recent decades with more diverse and fluid family formations, including generally lower fertility rates, varied first-birth and second-birth fertility rates, late marriage, late first birth and the destabilisation of marriage institutions with an increasing divorce rate. A lower level of intergenerational co-residence and population mobility have also weakened the geographical intimacy and practicality of providing physical support among family members. However, the state-led narratives and policy practices promoting harmonious families still reinforce the 'standard family' assumption that families are primarily childcare and financial resource providers to fill the welfare gap left by the market and the retreat of the state's welfare provisions.

These demographic transitions and welfare gaps are in conjunction with increasing living costs and a competitive labour market requiring dual-breadwinner households to maintain household finance. As a result, there are potentially more tensions between the changing patterns of family formation, living arrangements and the regulated function of families as primary welfare providers. Different forms of patriarchal practices across public and private spheres are re-configured and reshaped by the interplay of the market and the state's intervention. This process elaborates on the practice of gender justice in a top-down approach in contemporary China. From a macro and national perspective, these findings contextualise women's everyday experiences, as discussed in the following two chapters, which draw on women's stories from individual informant interviews.

Chapter 6 Comparing the Experiences of Women with Children in Contemporary China

Introduction

Drawing on the empirical data from semi-structured interviews with women, this chapter elaborates on the complexity and multidimensionality of women's everyday experiences. Informed by the human dignity approach, the dimensions of women's care relations, social integration and equal value, are considered; furthermore, the dynamic interaction between these dimensions is analysed to reveal how they manifest in women's daily lives. These analyses and discussions about women's care arrangement, labour market participation and career reveal different implications of the paradox in the economy and social development on practising gender justice in contemporary China.

This chapter includes three sections. Section 6.1 first discusses women's strategies and negotiations in care and paid work arrangements, including substantially dependent and interdependent on family relations (6.1.1 and 6.1.2) and the mixed-use of market, family and community resources (6.1.3). Then Section 6.2 focuses on the unsolved challenges and constrained resources that stop women from managing their care and paid work according to their preferences. It discusses attaining mobility and the ability to continue paid work after becoming a mother (6.2.1). Some women, particularly migrant women, have to compromise more de-attachment in their care relations, for example, geographical separation from their children (6.2.2). These unsolved challenges and compromises also reproduced traditional gender relations and reshaped gender dynamics, focusing on women's interactions with their male partners (6.2.3). The final section, Section 6.3, elaborates on the practice of gender justice in the labour market through women's working experiences. It examines the manifestation of the production of the dual labour market in public and private sectors (6.3.1) and the unrecognised value and exclusion of mother roles under the market mechanism (6.3.2).

6.1 Care arrangements and labour market participation: Coping Strategies

6.1.1 Full support from the family: Under the same roof

As discussed in Chapter 5, childcare services for children under three years old is an underdeveloped policy agenda in contemporary China. In the context of limited public resources and private services, this sub-section focuses on the common strategy among the interviewees, substantially depending on the family, for women to manage their care relations and paid work arrangements with fewer compromises. It examines family support through a close living arrangement and childcare support from different family members.

Most interviewees who intended to continue their labour market participation after maternity leave successfully maintained their paid work because the older generation, particularly their mothers (in-laws), shared childcare with them. As a result, these women can return to paid work after a maternity leave without pausing their careers and dropping out of the labour market. According to most interviewees, seeking support from parents (in-laws) living nearby or together was often the first consideration in managing labour market participation and maintaining close care relations (physically and emotionally) with their dependent children. This strategy of relying on and trusting parents (in-laws) to provide childcare strengthens the proximity between nuclear and extended families. It also consolidates the unchanged family functions in delivering care within the family. In the Chinese context, with the shrinking family size and a lower level of intergenerational co-residence (see Chapter 5), the importance of family support and the family network remains intact in people’s everyday lives, particularly regarding sharing childcare responsibilities.

From women’s accounts, it is clear that they have to rely on the availability of this childcare support to resume their paid work. This situation also assumes that women primarily have gendered attributes and responsibilities of undertaking childcare unless other family members, normally the mothers (in-laws), are willing to share them. Qinfen (29 years old), a full-time school teacher in Village L, planned to continue her full-time paid work after maternity leave. She and her husband had been living with her parents-in-law since marriage. Her mother-in-law agreed to look after her six-month-old baby.

> Both my husband and I need to work full-time. We live with our parents-in-law; thus, it is very convenient for my mother-in-law to take care of my child before he could attend kindergarten at age three. In return, we are going to support our parents-in-law when they get older. (Qinfen, 29, one child aged six months, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

To better accommodate the care arrangements, some interviewees described a clear division of labour at home with other family members, allowing everyone to share a fair proportion of unpaid care work and avoiding a heavy workload for their older parents. Working as a full-time PhD researcher in Guangzhou city, Linn (26 years old) has a two-year-old child. She articulated a household strategy with a clear division of labour: the adult children maintain the household income, and the older parents share childcare responsibilities during the day. In the evening, Linn and her husband engaged in more childcare so the older parents could take a break.

> The childcare responsibility rests on my mother and dad. My husband and I are responsible for maintaining the household income. The division of labour is clear. I will not interfere with my mother's decision on how she looks after my daughter. After working hours, my husband and I will take charge of the childcare whenever we can…to be honest, even though we live together, my parents look after us more than we do. (Linn, 26, one child aged two, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

For interviewees with children above three years old, the older parents were more likely to share the responsibilities of dropping off and picking up the children from kindergarten or pre-school classes. Qianxin (27-year-old), with a full-time job and two children aged three and six, highlighted the importance of adjusting the childcare strategies when their children grow older—namely, more parenting and education responsibilities. Although the focus on childcare has changed, her older parents still play an important role in sharing childcare to guarantee her time spent on paid work in the labour market.

> When my husband and I go to work, my parents take care of my children’s daily life, including picking them up, dropping them off at kindergarten and cooking dinner. I

> am responsible for education. The support from my parents extends from looking after me in the past to their grandchildren nowadays. (Qianxin, 27, two children aged three and six, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

Drawing on women's experiences receiving full support from family members, mainly parents (in-laws), urban interviewees raised some interesting points about the changes in their household relations. They found that, compared with the past, older parents nowadays expect less from their children in terms of looking after them financially and physically. Although these adult children had established their nuclear families, their parents still continually supported them in different forms. Family relations do not necessarily follow Confucianism's expectations: in Confucianism, the younger generation is supposed to financially and physically support and care for the older parents. With better-off finances and a guaranteed pension, at least in urban China, family relations have become more practical and mutually supportive in an equal way between the old and the young rather than merely emphasising the hierarchy imposed by the parents on their adult children.

However, there are also spatial variations in the pattern of receiving full support from the family between rural and urban women. The rural interviewees commonly mentioned their duties and expectation as adult children to take care of their parents in the future. Due to the lower coverage in pensions and welfare support (also see Chapter 5, section 5.1), the older parents in the rural family and their adult children are more likely to establish reciprocal and interdependent relations: mutual family support and ongoing resources exchanges across generations. Older parents provide childcare in exchange for their adult children can provide adult care for them in the future. Generally, age seniority within the family has been weakened and gradually replaced by the prioritisation of the younger generations and the cooperative strategy across generations to maximise household interests.

As women's lived experiences show, family support is often recognised as the first strategy for making care and paid work arrangements and better balancing time and energy in family and workplace. However, when living together, close family support comes with compromising autonomy in intergenerational relations and privacy, with more intervention from other family members. Some women who can afford a new flat near their extended family potentially maintain more decision making autonomy within the nuclear family. However, the household economy greatly restrains the choice of this living arrangement. The following sub-section will further explore more nuanced variations in terms of other forms of family support beyond living with extended family under the same roof.

6.1.2 Quasi-coresidence and financial support: Close family support with space and privacy

In this study, a loose form of 'co-residence' with a separate house and frequent family interaction, defined as quasi-coresidence (Ofstedal et al., 1999), has become another family coping strategy to ensure privacy while maintaining close access to childcare support from family. Previous research (Chen, 2005; Zimmer and Korinek, 2010) highlights quasi-coresidence as a strategy to undertake care for older people near the end of life. This study emphasises this as an adaptive family strategy among the young generations to share childcare responsibilities and housework (e.g., cooking) with their parents (in-laws). This form of living arrangement is more pragmatic in rural areas where the communal land allocated for the nuclear family and their extended family is always close by. However, for families living in urban areas, this arrangement is more achievable for those with better economic conditions because most families are not necessarily able to afford two flats in the same residential area. For example, Xiaoqiuqiu (25 years old) has a one-year-old child and lives in urban China.

> My husband, my son and I live together. My parents (in-laws) live in the same residential area within walking distance. My parents-in-law come to my home to look after my child when I am at work. They also cook for us. With a short distance from their home, it is easy to support each other while not intervening with each other. This is an ideal way for me to balance my family and work. (Xiaoqiuqiu, 25, one child aged one, urban, stay-at-home mother, partnered household)

In the Chinese modernisation process, quasi-coresidence is used to accommodate the need for individualisation among the younger generation and having access to close childcare support within a short geographical distance. As discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.2, there are limited affordable and trustworthy childcare services to compensate for the gap left by the withdrawal of public childcare services after the economic reform. These social realities have necessitated people to team up with family members and foster more intergenerational support. Quasi-coresidence is also a result of emerging daily conflicts between the young and the old generations. Living in the city, Qi (26 years old), working full time, has a three-year-old child. She and her husband decided to move out of the shared house with her parents-in-law after experiencing daily arguments about lifestyles, such as how to cook and do the laundry. And they live in a nearby residential area within walking distance of their parents-in-law. At this short distance, Qi maintained more self-determination in managing the nuclear family and close access to childcare support from her parents-in-law:

> After moving out, life gets much easier since we do not need to deal with different living habits and lifestyles. Within this short distance (2 km) between us, my parents-in-law could still care for my daughter when I was at work. We also eat together and cook together. After dinner, we (the nuclear family) walk back to our flat. (Qi, 26, one child aged three, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

The living arrangement of quasi-coresidence also manifests traditional values that emphasise patrilineality and patrilocality. Most interviewees with quasi-coresidence patterns usually lived near their parents-in-law rather than their parents, particularly in rural China.

> In rural areas, living close to parents-in-law is normal and common, but we live on different floors in different flats while eating together daily. It is convenient to look after them, receive childcare support, and have more personal space and privacy. (Yueshun, aged 28, two children aged two and three months, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

> My husband and his siblings are all living very close to my parents-in-law. That is why it is very convenient to help each other. Eating together and hanging out are quite common every week. I mostly interact more with my husband's family. (Shasi, aged 28, one child aged three, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

Family support also extended to different dimensions than childcare and housework support. The support included financial support, which is not restricted to geographical proximity in intergenerational co-residence or quasi-co-residence. Chuya and Azhu represent such cases. Both of their parents-in-law did not want to spend too much time and energy sharing childcare because they were either occupied with paid work or wanted to enjoy relaxed retirement life. Because their families were financially secure enough, the parents-in-law supported these two young couples via financial contributions instead of sharing childcare personally. Older parents' better-off finance and the shifting social norms make them diversify the types of family support that accommodate their current lifestyles and maintain more interdependent family relations.

> My parents-in-law did not share the childcare, but they gave me some money to hire a housekeeper. That is pretty nice to get financial support from them and have fewer conflicts because we are not living under the same roof. (Chuya, aged 27, two children aged two and four years, urban, part-time work, partnered household)

> My parents-in-law paid most costs for clothes and milk for my child. They never asked us to pay any money or give them any money. On the contrary, they always financially 'subsidised' us in different ways. (Azhu, aged 30, one child aged four years, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

In the question of satisfying women's self-determination, this family strategy is beneficial for young working couples who want to maintain their careers, keep their children nearby and develop more financial independence in the nuclear family for the future. It became clear that the increasing number of nuclear families and the more independent living arrangements do not represent fewer interactions or intimacy between the nuclear family and their extended family, especially their parents (in-laws). These intergenerational interactions in women's lived experiences have elaborated on more resources concentrated on the younger generations, ranging from childcare support (see sub-section 6.1.1.) to financial support, whether living together or not. However, due to the substantial reliance on the older parents (in-laws), the ambivalence in these intergenerational relations can be another story that reshapes the barriers and opportunities for women to maintain care relations and decision making autonomously. These complexities of supporting self-determination in intergenerational interactions are fully discussed in Chapter 7.

6.1.3 Seeking combined resources from the family and the market

This sub-section focuses on how the interviewees seek different resources from the community and the market to achieve work–life balance rather than merely relying on family resources. In terms of using private childcare services in the market, interviewees with children in different age cohorts have perceived these services differently. For those with a young child aged under three years, full-time childcare services are not always the choice among families with limited budgets. The interviewees with school-aged children were more likely to have choices in the commodified and comparatively affordable after-school tutoring services to achieve a better work–life balance. For this coping strategy, seeking combined resources, women's decisions were affected by the availability of childcare support from the family, the flexibility and affordability of private childcare and tutoring services, and the income from and quality of their paid work.

Some interviewees with better economic conditions had different expectations about sharing care and family responsibilities and chose to purchase social services to share some of these responsibilities, such as housework and after-school tutoring. With two children aged 9, Liuyan (39 years old), a senior manager in a private company in Guangzhou city, 'share[d] the housework and tutoring work with the people who are good at doing it: the housekeeper and the private tutor'. Seeking combined resources from the market and family freed up more time to develop her career. It also reduced the housework responsibilities previously shared by the parents-in-law, who were in poor health. However, few women can pay for different services to share the housework and tutoring roles.

> If I stay at home, what I can do is do housework and tutor my children's homework. I hire a housekeeper to share the housework, and I pay for after-school tutoring classes for children's homework support. The evening is my free time with my children, like intimate bonding time between my children and me. This is the way I can balance my work and family. (Liuyan, 39, two children aged nine and ten, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

To help take care of children during this period, commodified and private after-school tutoring classes continued to emerge for school-aged children; these provided more choices for women and their families to share childcare responsibilities with the market when family support was not available. However, this mostly happens when the children are of school age. Living in the city, Youyou (35 years old) started a full-time job and found a nearby after-school tutoring organisation to bridge the time gap between when school ends at 4 pm and when she finishes work at 6 pm. By sending her daughter to the private after-school tutoring class, Youyou had more autonomy to continue her full-time paid work and enjoy more personal time to participate in community activities and social gatherings.

> I send my daughter to the after-school tutoring class, and then I do not need to pick her up early and prepare her lunch in the middle of the day. I can set my mind at ease to continue my full-time job now. (Youyou, 35, one child aged seven years, urban, full-time, partnered household, migrant)

For those with a young child under three, paying a full-time nursery fee is a considerable financial burden since after-school tutoring services are generally cheaper than the nursery. Therefore, interviewees with children under three commonly mentioned their struggles and the ‘cost-benefit’ calculation to plan their paid work and care relations with combined resources from their families and the market when discussing childcare services. Xiaoxiaoyu (30 years old), who had two children aged two and four, discussed another key point about the ratio between childcare costs and her salary income. She found that her salary was barely enough to pay for the full-time nursery. If she did not have a ‘decent’ salary, from a monetary perspective, working full-time in the labour market meant having to pay a full-time package for her children’s childcare services. As she described it, “I am literally working for the babysitters, with all my salary paid to the nursery.” In this case, paid work with limited chances and resources for career progression is easy to give up on childcare once the salary income is not as good enough to afford childcare services or benefit household finance in the long run (more discussions about household finance in Chapter 7 sub-section 7.1.1).

> It is about the budget. If I spend five thousand yuan (up to 450 GBP) per month hiring a babysitter, I would rather take care of the baby myself and be a full-time mother. My salary at work is not very high anyway. (Xiaoxiaoyu, 30, two children aged two and four, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

When discussing the perceptions of private childcare services, many interviewees refer to the childminder as a 'stranger' who is not as trustworthy as family members. These understandings also highlighted the intact Confucianism and the importance of family rather than a modernising market with commodified childcare services. A rural interviewee, Bi (40 years old), a stay-at-home mother, who has a 10-year-old child, expressed that the current childcare services in the market are 'unsafe' and 'poorly regulated'. This situation made her less willing to seek support and childcare resources not provided by family members. Similarly, as a stay-home mother, Emma (40 years old), with two children aged four and seven years, shared similar concerns. According to her description, family and close family members always provide better environments, with people looking after children as part of the family function. Considering the price, quality and perception of childcare services in the market, seeking combined resources from the family and the market does not seem to be an easy choice for women:

> If there is one sick child in the childcare centre, it is easy to spread the illness among all the children. Many private childcare centres have failed safety tests. Most of them are not qualified. In this situation, I prefer taking care of my child myself or getting some support from my parents. (Bi, 40, one child aged ten, rural, partnered household, stay-at-home mother)

> I hired a babysitter during my maternity leave. I was not really satisfied with them. I felt that I was not uncomfortable leaving my child with a stranger. So, I decided to be a housewife since children are better with their families and familiar people. (Emma, two children aged four and seven, urban, partnered household, stay-at-home mother)

Between intimate care relations with their young children and a full-time job, between full-time salary and high childcare costs, between career developments and the guilt of spending less time to care, women have often ‘calculated’ costs and benefits when seeking alternatives in care and paid work arrangements. Among the interviewees, women from single-parent households have less support and even fewer choices. As a single mother working full time, Xiao (37 years old) found it challenging to have adequate time to take care of her children’s (10 and 12 years old) daily life after school because she has to work overtime to ensure an adequate income for the family. According to her experiences, the ongoing discrimination and stigmatisation of divorced women in rural China also made her feel nervous about switching jobs, which can bring more uncertainty to her unstable income. As a result, she turned to a boarding school that allowed her children to have a more regular daily routine, though boarding school is more expensive than public school.

> … at least a private boarding school provides me with a solution. My current job requires long working hours, and I am not able to pick them up after school on time. There is no way to find a job with a good salary and flexible schedules for committing to childcare responsibilities alone, especially for people like us single mothers. Honestly, I would prefer it if they stayed at home and went to a normal primary school. Then I can at least be with them after work and have a closer parenting relationship. (Xiao, 37, two children aged ten and twelve, rural, full-time work, single-parent household)

Like Xiao’s experience, women who experienced divorce face more social stigmatisation and exclusion in access to informal support from colleagues and friends in their everyday lives due to social stereotypes. In this case, these women from single-parent households find it more difficult to leave their paid work and provide more care and parenting time for their children. It is worth noting that none of the women who participated in the fieldwork from single-parent households was stay-at-home mothers (see Chapter 4, section 4.2, tables 4.4 and 4.5). It reveals that maintaining household income became the priority among these single mothers. And to do so, they might have to adjust their care arrangements, like making full use of the market services, to accommodate their paid work arrangements. Even though Xiao has more self-determination of her care arrangement with the available market services, rather than relying on family resources, maintaining household income and spending time on care and parenting are still uneasy balances.

6.2 Constraints and unresolved conflicts: Exploring flexibility and trade-offs

6.2.1 Looking for temporary flexibility: Reluctant adjustments in care and career

In the previous section, women's strategies and processes of maintaining care relations and paid work revealed the continuities and changes in family support, commodifying market services and varied understandings of different care and career arrangements depending on their available resources. However, not all women are in a situation where they can manage care relations and paid work according to their preferences. As a result, some interviewees had to sacrifice and compromise different dimensions of their everyday life ranging from care, paid work, career and other forms of social integration beyond family and work life.

Regarding maintaining care relations with limited family support, those facing a larger couple income gap find themselves with less self-determination to carry on their full-time jobs (also see more discussions about household finances in Chapter 7, section 7.1). Chunyan, a 29-year-old woman with two children aged four and six, felt that it was difficult to devote her time to a full-time job when her children were still young. To maximise the household income and reduce childcare costs, she resigned from her full-time job and worked part-time to devote more time to maintaining care relations with two children. According to her description, giving up her full-time job with a stable income, albeit lower than her husband's, was a difficult decision that she characterised as a constrained choice due to limited family resources and affordable childcare services. This situation gives women little choice other than to pause their careers or choose part-time work that allows flexibility.

> I did not want to resign and become a full-time care provider. However, my parents (aged mid-50s) are still working full-time. Therefore, my husband and I can not both work full-time jobs. To be pragmatic, we decided that I look after the two young children, and my husband would be responsible for the household income. By doing this, we can maximise the interest of the family. (Chunyan, 29, two children aged four and six, urban, part-time work, partnered household)

Some interviewees lived a substantial distance from both their parents and parents-in-law. Although their families were often willing to look after the young children, there were more concerns and worries related to their children's education, intergenerational parenting and the breakdown of intimate relations. Not wanting to be separated from their children, some interviewees rejected this compromise and decided to be stay-at-home mothers until their children could be admitted into primary school age. As a stay-at-home mother, Emma (40 years old), with two children aged four and seven, was one of these interviewees. She did not send her child back to the parents-in-law who live in another city; instead, she resigned from her full-time job and lived in the city where her husband works.

> My mother-in-law is willing to look after my daughter, but I do not want my daughter to be a left-behind child back home without me. So then I decided not to send her back with her grandparents, and it is better for her childhood and well-being. However, I have to be a stay-at-home mother in this case. (Emma, 40, two children aged four and seven, urban, partnered household, stay-at-home mother)

As a factor in the Chinese modernisation process, rapid urbanisation comes with increased working opportunities and better income in cities. In the context of the rural–urban divide, domestic migrants mobilise from rural to urban China for work opportunities. However, as the empirical data show, there is an emerging trend that some domestic migrants return to rural China as an adjusting strategy for families. Having two children aged two months and three, Xian (29 years old) initially worked in the city but returned to the village and gave up the careers they had built in the city after having her second child. She did not want to be separated from her older child, who was looked after by Xian's mother-in-law. Without having the same education and medical care rights as the local urban residents, if bringing both children to live in the city, she needed to pay extra tuition fees and medical insurance for her children when they reached school. Under the household registration system, not only female migrants themselves but also their school-age children were excluded. Xian also highlights that the higher living cost in the city also makes her parents (in-laws) with lower salary income in the village more difficult to mobilise to the city.

> I wish I could work in the city, with more employment opportunities and higher salaries. My mother-in-law was willing to take care of my young child in the village while not financially capable of mobilising to the city with us. I did not want to miss the time to stay with my children, so my husband and I decided to return to the village. (Xian, 29, two children aged three and two months, rural, part-time work, partnered household)

The rural-urban divide has affected women's experiences in different ways. Policy stakeholders explicitly explained this spatial divide regulated and practised in policies, including the right to receive better welfare access, education resources and the right to buy a house (see Chapter 5). More implicitly, higher living costs in cities and the lower salary income level in villages also make rural women's families more difficult to mobilise to cities and maintain close family support as the locals. Due to these geographical distances and the unequal welfare provisions, migrant families like Xian's face more institutional and economic barriers to satisfying their children's needs in education and making care arrangements with their children to live together in the city.

6.2.2 Compromised care relations: Detachment and geographical separation

With the emphasis on mutuality in care relations in this study, it is important to recognise women's right to care for and maintain intimate relations with their family members, particularly their dependent children. As previous sections have highlighted, the age of a woman's children and the availability of family support affected how women maintained their care relations and self-determination in labour market participation. However, not all women can balance both properly. After re-entering the labour market soon after their maternity leave, the nature of the labour market in modernised China—including the competitive working environment, long working hours and gender and age discrimination—made balancing intimate care relations and career development more difficult.

Working in a job is not necessarily the most desirable choice for women if they prefer to establish intimate relations and spend more time with their children, despite compromising their household income in the long term. Some interviewees have faced challenges in satisfying the preference for maintaining care relations with their dependent children by caring for them full-time versus maintaining a reasonable household income with paid work in the labour market. Caring for children at home without a stable income is a difficult decision for those with financial pressure. Without enough financial support and public subsidy, it is difficult for women to simultaneously maintain care relations as full-time care providers, even temporarily, and achieve financial independence. Intimacy in care relations becomes a privilege for families with better economic conditions.

Currently, on maternity leave, Jasmine (26 years old), who was self-employed and ran a clothes shop in Guangzhou city, has two children aged three months and three. She found it difficult to be a stay-at-home mother and care for two young children full-time. The financial stress of living in the city pushed her to find a stable job to increase their household income and save up for the children’s tuition fees. Luckily, her mother was willing to share childcare. Even though she wanted to spend more time with her young children, she had to resume her full-time job immediately after maternity leave.

> I enjoy staying with my children when they are young. If working full-time, I will not be able to catch up on these precious moments with them. However, the reality is that both my husband and I need to work harder and work full-time to pay the bills and maintain household finances. (Jasmine, 26, two children aged three and three months, urban, on maternity leave, partnered household, migrant)

In addition to financial constraints, locations and geographical proximity are also important for women’s care arrangements. As discussed in sub-section 6.2.1, some interviewees have faced more uncertainties and challenges in access to family support if their extended family are not living in the same location. This situation is more evident among rural domestic migrant women. After finishing her BA degree in the city, Xiaodai (30 years old) settled down in the city and got a job before her child was born. Before becoming a stay-at-home mother, she worked at an Internet company with guaranteed Employee Five Social Security Insurance (more discussions see in Chapter 5, sub-section 5.2.2). She planned to return to work after the guaranteed maternity leave, and her parents-in-law were willing to look after the newborn baby in the village, a two-hour train ride from the city. However, she was depressed and unwilling to be separated from her newborn after maternity leave. Ultimately, she resigned from her job and stayed home with her child for another six months. Like most working-class families, it was challenging to maintain stable savings with only her husband earning an income. Therefore, at the time of the interview, Xiaodai decided to return to the city and look for a new job, leaving her baby with her parents-in-law living in the village. By doing so, she thought she and her husband could be more stable, settling down in the city and acquiring more savings with both of them working; this would support their future reunion with their child.

> After the maternity leave, I was asked to either come back to work full-time or resign. There is no third choice. It would be so much better if I could have unpaid maternity leave to help me get through the transition of being a new mother until my son turns one year old. Now I have to accept the separation from my child for three years and get him in the city when my husband and I are more financially stable. Then we can have a reunion. (Xiaodai, 30, one child aged one, urban, partnered household, full-time work, migrant)

In the context of the rural–urban divide, these women and their partners dreamed of and fought for a better life quality by developing a better career in the city and providing more resources for the next generations. Temporary separation from their young children became a family coping strategy in care arrangements. This decision might maximise household income but not family well-being by physically separating mothers from their dependent children and creating a distant care relationship. This scenario reveals the incompatibility of the Confucian traditions, the existing social policies assuming family as the primary welfare provider and Chinese socio-economic transitions in the context of smaller family size, population mobility and the remaining institutional barriers. The absence of government intervention leaves decisions about maintaining care relations and providing childcare to the family. Suppose there were more affordable childcare services or subsidies that support women to go through the transition from maternity leave to being ready to re-enter the labour market and make more autonomous decisions in care arrangements. In that case, those women without close family support can exert more self-determination on how and where to care for their children instead of maintaining a distant care relationship and rushing back to the labour market.

Migrants with degrees and professional training qualifications, like Xiaodai, are defined as the 'new generation' of migrant workers in contemporary China (National Population and Family Planning Commission 2013). Education attainments among the floating population have significantly improved over the past 15 years. There was a significant increase in education attainments of tertiary education and above, from 4.7% in 2000 to 23.2% in 2015, among the floating population (National Bureau of Statistics 2015, 2020). In this study, migrants do not refer to the first-generation migrants, who face lower-paid jobs with fewer skills demands, unguaranteed social security and household registration barriers. Rather, the empirical data shows that most migrant interviewees have received more education and settled down in urban areas after completing their education or finding a job with guaranteed social security insurance. In the young migrant generation, settling in the city and attaining urban residency might become a universal path for those well-educated migrants. However, the household registration system has continually constructed different forms of institutional barriers and social exclusion, which generates compromised and precarious care relations among these migrants.

According to the empirical data, considerable geographical separation from the family network is no longer a phenomenon limited to those migrants moving from rural to urban China. There are more subtle transitions among the cities in the different tiers[31] and the villages in terms of different township levels. Some of the interviewees had urban residency from less developed cities and moved to another more economically developed city for educational or better working opportunities (also see the types of population mobility in Figure 5.8 in Chapter 5, sub-section 5.1.3). Settling down in the city after finishing their degrees or job reallocations, they found it challenging to maintain their jobs after childbirth because their parents and parents-in-law did not live near their city. Relying on parents (in-laws) to provide childcare, some sent their children to live with their parents or parents-in-law so they could have more time at work, and then they visited their young children regularly. This dilemma of maintaining distant care relations also happens in rural China. Working full-time in Village L with her husband, Meiyuan (27 years old) sends her two-year-old child to her mum, who is living in a nearby city, to share childcare responsibilities.

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[31] The Chinese government categorises cities into different tiers based on the city size, population and GDP.

> Private childcare is expensive, and my parents are available to share the childcare. So I sent my son back to my mum, who lives in the city around 60 miles away. I normally visit him once a week. I hope to have a 'reunion' when he turns four and can attend kindergarten. (Meiyuan, 27, one child aged two, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

As highlighted in Chapter 5, Section 5.1, smaller family sizes and less multi-generational co-residing reveal the widening geographical living distance between the nuclear and extended families. However, from the empirical findings, not living together does not mean fewer connections or less cross-generational family proximity. This finding is similar to Izuhara's (2010) discussions about the co-existence of the changing family structure, the practice of re-maintaining family function and close family relations. Meanwhile, the separation between mothers and children also implies a paradoxical phenomenon: the physical family intimacy emphasised by Confucianism and Chinese culture has been breached because of the need to maintain full-time paid work in contemporary China. Locality and distance are not the most critical factors affecting the availability of childcare support from extended families that may not live nearby. Women's experiences in maintaining distant care relations show that families do not necessarily have to be living together under the same roof or in the same neighbourhood to extend the reach of care support from family.

Among the interviewees in this research, the patterns of living arrangements were diverse, including co-residing with parents(in-law) or (and) and adult siblings; living as a nuclear family with a close geographical distance from family networks; living as a couple-only household, with children living hundreds of miles away with older parents (in-law); or having older parents(in-law) take turns visiting and co-residing periodically. In addition, regarding gender interactions in living arrangements, albeit uncommon, some migrant interviewees and their dependent children live in a different city or village during weekdays and only visit the male partner working in another location over the weekend. Women's lived experiences have revealed the increasingly diverse and mobile family living patterns and flexible family structures to accommodate the need to maintain paid work, pursue a career in more economically-developed areas, and maintain care relations within the family. Although there are different forms of compromises in these care relations, these family coping strategies have also demonstrated the adaptability of how Chinese women and their families respond to real-life challenges and socio-economic transitions by enhancing family solidarity, regardless of distance and living arrangements.

6.2.3 Male partners' childcare participation: Willingness and availability

The expectation that the women's partner will offer proactive and engaging participation in childcare and housework is a commonly raised topic when discussing how to better manage care relations and career development. As some interviewees describe, negotiating with the partner can be described as 'the last straw' of saving or crushing their daily life. There are two themes, willingness and availability, related to the engagement of male partners' participation in family life. However, rural and urban respondents had slightly different preferences related to these two aspects. Rural respondents commonly complained about their partner's unwillingness and impatience when sharing childcare. When choosing between childcare and housework, their partners usually choose housework, which was recognised as 'requiring less skill and patience'. For urban respondents, time available for family life is often the focus.

Willingness is connected to how the interviewees and the male partner perceived gender roles. Both rural and urban respondents described their expectations related to their partners' active participation in childcare, housework and care for the older parents. This active participation referred to both proactive attitudes and a fair proportion of time spent fulfilling family responsibilities. Some of the rural interviewees mentioned that the male partner asked them to resign and give up their jobs if they thought handling housework and paid work was too difficult. Lili is 33 years old and works in the local government with a stable work contract. Lili was angry when her husband asked her to resign if she could not manage childcare and her full-time paid work. As Lili argues, there are still unchanged assumptions of gender roles and social expectations about what women should do and what men should do based on the traditional gendered division of labour. Her male partner assumed the wife was tired and busy because of the paid work and did not recognise her effort and contribution in sharing childcare and housework. She also faces a dilemma in which her male partner assumes that women can perform better in childcare and housework than men:

> He does not want to look after the child and prefers housework, like cleaning and cooking. He usually does what he wants to undertake rather than what I want him to do. He also claimed that I could do better in childcare and housework because I had more patience. (Lili, 33, one child aged six, full-time work, rural, partnered household)

A number of rural interviewees also perceived and followed the traditional gender roles, accepting the male partner's occasional absence in sharing childcare and parenting. Suyi (39 years old) has two children, aged twelve and fourteen and works part-time in a private company. She described her husband as an 'alternate':

> ... and my husband fills in for us [parents-in-law and Suyi] as an 'alternate' to fill the gap when needed. (Suyi, 39, two children aged twelve and fourteen, rural, part-time work, partnered household)

In addition to how interviewees and the male partner perceived gender roles, male partners' engagement in family life was also shaped by their availability to be with family. This availability is often affected by men's working hours and workload in the labour market. Several urban interviewees thought the lack of availability of their partners was the most important reason for their absence in sharing childcare responsibilities. Specifically, they recognised that the absence was related to the long working hours, promotion competition and traditional gendered social expectations in the labour market. These factors in the labour market position men in a vacuum in terms of care responsibilities and deprive men of the free choice to maintain care relations at home. The outcome of this is that the partner's absence also results in more family responsibilities for women in the end. Working full time, Hada (29 years old) has a 3-year-old child.

> I wish my partner could have more and more holidays with the family. However, men are always the person appointed to go on business trips. It is unequal for my husband, who really wants to engage with our child with more free time. The expectation for men to go on business trips all the time is taking men's right to care for their families away. As his wife, it is unfair for me to take on more family responsibilities in the long term. (Hada, 29, one child aged three, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

In addition to childcare, the younger mothers interviewed in this study mentioned their psychological burden during pregnancy brought about by maternity checks. Because of the limited parental leave for men (only granted after childbirth), their male partners were not entitled to paid leave during pregnancy unless they asked for non-paid leave. As a result, women might attend most maternity checks alone or with other family members and friends. Azhu (30 years old) and TT (29 years old) shared experiences of being depressed and nervous when their male partners were unavailable and not entitled to any paid leave during their pregnancy when the women underwent all kinds of prenatal tests. Both workplace and the state need to adjust how they perceive men's participation in childcare and during women's pregnancy. Generally, in the Chinese context, the involvement of fathers (to-be) is not recognised or institutionally supported by leave or other forms of resources.

> I was scared when I did the Down syndrome and diabetes tests. I could not fall asleep one night before. However, my husband was busy at work and was not able to come with me. I was lonely and scared. Luckily, my mum came with me for these critical maternity checks. However, I do prefer my husband's companionship. (Azhu, 30, one child aged four, full-time work, rural, partnered household)

> I saw some people post on their social media: I am so strong that my husband did not come to the maternity check. This kind of 'being strong' is very miserable and ironic. Maternity and pregnancy should never be my own business. It is nearly impossible always to have his companionship because there are many maternity checks in different months. It is mentally and physically stressful for women to do the tests and wait for the result without their partners' support. (TT, 29, one child aged one, full-time work (on maternity leave), urban, partnered household)

6.3 The practice of gender justice in the labour market

As highlighted in the human dignity approach, it is important to understand women’s experiences from a broad perspective and connect the interlinked social, economic and institutional dynamics. Women’s experiences in the workplace affect their self-determination in the strategies and processes of care arrangements and shape the division of labour at home. This section investigates women’s lived experiences in the labour market. In addition, it compares how different groups of women might be affected by their working experiences in distinct ways and re-configure their care relations, social integration and self-determination in family practices.

6.3.1 Production of the dual labour markets in the public and private sectors

Women’s experiences in the labour market vary depending on their roles, industries and personal specifications (see Chapter 2, sub-sections 2.2.2 and 2.3.3). In the empirical data, another factor evidently distinguishes women’s experiences in the labour market—namely, the dual labour markets in the public and private sectors. Like Feng et al.’s (2020) discussions about the privilege of working in the public sector, this study also finds that women working in the public sector (e.g., SOEs, public schools and universities, and government) face fewer challenges regarding the ‘motherhood penalty’. Although the state has retreated from the labour market in the private sector in several ways, it still profoundly shapes the labour market in the public sector. The co-existence of these jobs in the public (state) and the private (market) sectors has featured a more segmented labour market in contemporary China.

The recruitment process, social welfare and security system, and payment differ in the two sectors, and different studies have discussed these variations (Gornick and Jacobs, 1998; Kanamori and Zhao, 2004; Dong et al., 2006; Feng et al., 2020). The labour market in the public sector continues to feature better welfare benefits, employment stability and a steadily increasing salary. Women in the public sector have better protection from the social security system, especially when it comes to maternity welfare. Woking full-time in the public sector, Xiaoxiaoyu (30 years old), a woman with two children aged two and four years, shared her understanding and experiences about the advantages of working in the public sector—namely, stable income and appropriate workload.

> Compared with other sectors, the work unit is better. That is why I chose to work in the public sector: modest but very stable income and an appropriate workload. It is perfect for me to balance my family and working life. (Xiaoxiaoyu, 30, two children aged two and four, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

Regulated maternity and breastfeeding leave are also critical for ensuring that women can meet their increased childcare responsibilities before their children reach school age. According to Abing (30 years old) and Yu (32 years old), who both worked in the public sector, their work units still strictly implemented maternity welfare and breastfeeding leave, allowing them to have a relatively relaxed first-year transition to being a new mother. More importantly, there is less 'motherhood penalty' and fewer disadvantages, including a reduced salary or demotion experienced by those working in the private sector and informal employment. They commented,

> Breastfeeding leaves, maternity leaves, and benefits are written in policy documents. We are under the direction of the government and managed by the government. Therefore, it is less likely for the law to be broken. This is the benefit of working in the public sector, particularly for the government. (Abing, 30, two children aged three and five years, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

> My work unit is quite second-child policy friendly. We have all the welfare benefits based on law, including guaranteed salary and medical insurance. These are all based on law. (Yu, 32, one child aged eight months, full-time work, urban, partnered household)

Public sector organisations are also supervised by government institutions and have to follow the law. Thus, the labour law and the relevant social security policies are implemented and supervised in a stricter way in the public sector. Profit-driven companies in the private sector tend to encourage their employees to work harder and be competitive for better profit. These different working cultures and the different natures of the public and private sectors bring up distinct forms of protection and challenges for women working in different sectors. Zhong (29 years old) previously worked in a private tutor company and now works in a public school in the city. According to her description, in some private companies, maternity welfare makes it more difficult for employers to hire women and guarantee women's maternity insurance. Compared with the private sector, the public sector mostly follows the current law and implements all these benefits for women. Thus, women working in the public sector usually gain better benefits and protection. She commented,

> Previously in the private tutor company, working overtime was normal. Now in this public school, I am seldom asked to work overtime. Sometimes there are more projects than usual, but it is not that stressful, and they do not push you to get it done immediately. Most of the jobs are done within working hours. (Zhong, 29, one child aged one, full-time work, urban, partnered household)

Under the centrally controlled governance in contemporary China, the public sector implements strict gender equality policies and follows the gender mainstream imposed by the central government (Meng 2000). These policies, including maternity welfare, entitled breastfeeding leave and facilities, equal pay and a fair proportion of female leaders, are more strictly implemented and supervised by the centrally regulated public-sector labour market system. These safeguarded rights in the public sector workplace reduce the uncertainty of their labour force participation and prevent them from receiving under-regulated gender discrimination in the private sector, particularly during maternity leave. State's strict supervision in the public sector and the free play of the market in the private sector have differentiated how resources and opportunities are organised among women working in different sectors.

The supportive and inclusive working environment affects women's decisions regarding entering and opting out of the labour market when other care services and family support are unavailable. Working in the public sector seems to have more regulated protection for women. However, it is more difficult for those with lower academic qualifications to enter the public sector labour market. Compared with women working in the public sector, women in the private sector potentially face more precarity when it comes to guaranteeing their employment rights. This scenario substantially leads to higher possibilities of career pauses and withdrawal from the labour market, particularly during their maternity period (see more discussions in sub-section 6.3.2). In the long run, labour market segregation in the public and private sectors generates more inequalities among women with different socio-economic resources, highlighting the privilege of those with better educational backgrounds and more resources to experience more opportunities and face fewer discriminations in a better working environment.

With the advantages of stability and well-regulated social protection enforced by the state, the majority of women in this study working in the public sector have been constructed as the ‘most wanted occupations’ for their families, particularly after becoming mothers. These constructed advantages match the motherhood expectation in the Chinese context: women spend more time with childcare and parenting and play a role as the stable family backing (see more discussions about motherhood and parenting in Chapter 7, section 7.3). These practices also reinforce women’s gender performance: how women recognise their experiences working in a stable job with a regular working schedule and flexible working environments to better fulfil their gendered roles as wives, mothers and daughters (in-laws). With two children aged one and eleven living in urban China, Xiaohui (39 years old) recognises that having a stable job in the public sector is a family strategy.

> My husband works in the private sector, which somehow earns a higher salary but is less stable. His working hours are also not stable. I work in the public sector (public school teacher) with more guaranteed time off and a stable, though modest, income. It helps to balance family responsibilities better, and I can be the stable backing for the family. (Xioahui, 39, two children aged one and eleven, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

In previous research, Yu and Kuo (2017) show that women can experience fewer motherhood penalties if their jobs have greater schedule flexibilities and fewer teamwork demands. However, the potential negative effect emerges if only specific positions, sectors and industries have these flexible working environments. As women’s experiences show in this study, these gendered advantages are confined to those with a formal contract in the public sector. Though facing a more modest income, women still opted to work in industries and sectors that were more women- and family-friendly: stricter policy implementation and supervision, flexible working hours and a fair workload.

6.3.2 Unrecognised value and exclusion: The reconfigured mother role in the market

The social insurance system in China is individualised and mostly employment-based. The combination of formal labour market participation and entitlement to social security insurance further reinforces the priority of paid work in Chinese society (also see Chapter 5, sub-section 5.2.2). As reported in the empirical data, due to their care responsibilities, not all interviewees could rejoin the formal labour market and have a full-time job immediately after maternity leave. Living in urban China and with a four-year-old child, Shanshan (32 years old) finished her Master's degree before having her son. She had been working irregular but flexible part-time jobs for four years after her son was born. According to her description, even though a part-time job is not the perfect choice, these part-time jobs at least allow her to afford the basic public pension, medical care insurance,[32] and daily costs.

> I do not really like this part-time job that does not fully match my expertise. However, if I had not gotten these part-time jobs, I could not even have paid the basic public pension and medical insurance to buy myself a minimum safety net. I felt quite helpless and anxious about not having any social insurance just because I do not have a formal full-time job. (Shanshan, 32, one child aged five, urban, part-time work, partnered household)

Chan et al. (2008) summarise that the withdrawal of the planned economy and socialist welfare system has shifted female employees from state-reliant to self-reliant and family-dependent. Like Shanshan, women with full-time care responsibilities are unavailable for a full-time and formal job. The state did not provide extra childcare support or subsidised social security insurance to value and recognise the contribution of unpaid care work from these full-time care providers. The current social security system still largely expects families to be the primary risk-takers and care providers, which means that women become more dependent on family support and become financially fragile in dealing with crises during and after pregnancy. They have to face more trade-offs between relying on their male partners and working part-time jobs to secure their 'safety net' in social insurance. The combination of formal employment and social security insurance has also labelled those not working in the market as less valuable in this employment-based social security system.

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[32] It is referred as resident medical and pension insurance schemes for non-working or those without a formal employyment conrtact.

When working in the labour market, women's mother role is also re-configured with the unequal value between paid work and care relations. Working as a full-time photographer in the city, Huang (26 years old) has experienced demotion after finishing her maternity leave. She shared her experiences that the boss has urged her to reduce the influence of childcare and work as hard as other non-parent colleagues. Working mothers' care relations are not recognised and valued in the workplace but are excluded from their working life.

> I return back to work after maternity leave, and they assign me to do more administrative work. My line manager thought I did not have as much energy as before to compete for a senior position. My boss sometimes also compared me with other non-parent employees, saying how excellent their job performance is and asking me to keep up with them. These words make me doubt whether I can be both a mother and a well-performed employee simultaneously. (Huang, 26, one child aged one, urban, full-time work, partnered household, migrant)

With one child, aged two, living in urban China, Yu (35 years old) worked in a public school with a permanent contract. She compares her experiences as a mother with a young child with her male colleague with a young child. Yu did not experience a salary cut or demotion after the maternity leave. However, she experienced unwanted job reallocation and adjustment when she returned to work, while the same situation did not happen to her male colleagues with young children.

> I was the head teacher for my class. My line manager made me adjust my role as a supporting officer and assigned me some jobs that they recognised as 'easier' and 'less stressful'. And the director also told me that the 'adjustment' was for my good since I have a young child to look after. Being a mother was labelled with a layer of 'gendered filter': you are now busy with more care responsibilities and can not take

> more competitive work. However, this filter did not apply to other new fathers in my office. (Yu, 35, one child age two, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

According to these mothers' experiences, mother roles have been interpreted as less valuable than their employee roles, which also socially and institutionally constructs the incompatibility of being a mother and a committed employee in a competitive labour market. This scenario has disadvantaged women's rights to work and care with an easier balance. Even though working in different industries and positions affects the levels of discrimination women might experience, the unrecognised value of care relations and the exclusion of working mothers in the market are similar. These interpretations and reactions towards working mothers exclude them from promotion opportunities, chances and resources to select the work they prefer and cause a sense of dissatisfaction and unfulfillment in balancing dual identities being a mother and an employee.

Some interviewees also downplay their career development expectations and salary incomes. Working in private enterprises in Village L, Sha (38 years old) has two children aged 3 and 13. She has compromised a salary cut to secure her full-time job after her second child was born.

> A higher salary might come with the price of having less free time to look after the family. Having a second child might occupy more family time, so I have to accept the salary cut to ensure I can at least still have this job. (Sha, 38, one child aged three and thirteen, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3, Auspurg et al. (2017) show that women and men potentially recognise gendered wages and gaps as fair due to gender roles and gender identity in motherhood and fatherhood. This compromise of salary cuts to ensure job security has implied working mothers' precarious situations in the competitive labour market. In the context that care relation is not recognised as equally valuable as paid work, working mothers have to accept that lower earnings or demotion are justified in the labour market with gender stereotypes of being a mother with more childcare responsibilities. In this study, women's understandings and experiences also show more empirical evidence about the internal constraints of the 'good mother' identity that make women compromise lower-paying jobs and downplay the gender inequalities in the labour market driven by structural barriers and social discrimination. In the long term, this downplaying and perception as justified might translate into a more gendered wage gap between non-parent women and men and the exclusion of the value of unpaid care that is not calculated financially in the market.

Rural domestic migrant women experience dual discrimination due to gender and household registration status. Some migrant interviewees shared their experiences with more trade-offs between occupations, salary and social security insurance. Youyou (35 years old) is the case. When she searched for a full-time job, jobs with formal employment contracts were her prioritisation. However, due to her rural household registration status, the private company often give her a more modest salary and is less willing to enrol her as a formal employee with Employee Social Security Insurance. In her narration, a formal employment contract with entitlement to social security insurance is always the priority, and other aspects could be compromised.

> As a non-local and migrant mother, you could not get both: a good salary and stable employment with social security insurance. Sometimes I work harder, even over time to ensure that my employer keeps me on the formal employment contract. The employer might think you are non-local, and you might not settle down here anyway.
> (Youyou, 35, one child aged seven, full-time, urban, partnered household, migrant)

The competitive labour market has shown a mixed picture of increasing opportunities, challenges and segmentation for different groups of women. On the one hand, the Chinese transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy has led to women benefiting from better work opportunities in different sectors and equal allocation of educational resources to both women and men. On the other hand, under the interplay of the market mechanism and the state’s retreat, the private sector and the informal labour market further disadvantage women in precarious working conditions, with remaining wage discrimination and unguaranteed social security. This is especially the case for rural domestic migrants experiencing dual exclusions in urban China. Without being valued in their contribution to unpaid care work, women’s withdrawal from the labour market also exacerbates gender inequality. It pushes them into a greater risk of facing more financial insecurity in the long term. As the following Chapter 7 will illustrate, women's experiences in the labour market have affected their decision making in other dimensions of everyday lives, including household decision making, couple finance and parenting.

Conclusion

Guided by the human dignity approach, fulfilling women's autonomy and mutuality, as the critical welfare principle discussed in this thesis, is the central concern when analysing these women's multi-dimensional and complex lived experiences. This chapter has revealed women's struggles to fulfil the autonomy and mutuality in arranging their care and paid work, whether full-time or part-time. Women's convergence and divergence of coping strategies manifest how the existing ways of organising resources and opportunities distinguish different groups of women's experiences in practising gender justice. This process illustrates how women's everyday experiences vary owing to the intersecting dynamics of family resources, a double-tracked welfare system featuring the rural–urban divide, a competitive market segmented by the public and private sectors, and the unchanged social norms of the mother's role. The next chapter moves on to different interacting dimensions of women's everyday lives, including couple finance, household decision making and parenting.

Chapter 7 Contradictions, Continuity and Change: Couple Finance, Family Relations and Parenting Practices

Introduction

Drawing on women's lived experiences, the key focus in this chapter will be the continuities and changes in women's self-determination that extends from different dimensions of everyday lives. These key themes identified include couple finance, household decision making, family relations and parenting practices. By exploring how women's self-determination interacted with institutional, economic and social dynamics, these themes are interlinked to underline how women have been supported and challenged in achieving autonomy and mutuality as emphasised in the human dignity approach.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3, household finance is closely connected to women's self-determination in different dimensions and across gender and intergenerational relations (Yu and Cheng, 2021). Section 7.1 focuses on couple finance and household decision making that interacts with gender and intergenerational relations. It first highlights how household and couple finance interact with women's different self-determination processes and reshape the understanding of the (un)equal value of paid and unpaid household work (7.1.1 and 7.1.3). It also explores how women's fertility decisions, as a result of the interaction between different social, institutional and economic dynamics, are perceived and made in the context of diverse patterns of family formations, restructured labour market and public welfare (7.1.2). Section 7.2 focuses on the emerging patterns and challenges in practising family support and its implications on women's self-determination. It discusses the changes in equal resources between son and daughter (7.2.1), challenges of the substantial reliance on family under the shifting family planning policies (7.2.2) and tensions in intergenerational interactions (7.2.3). Finally, Section 7.3 discusses the implications of the market and family relations in shaping women's opportunities and challenges to undertake parenting practices autonomously, which broadens the understanding of women's multiple roles and responsibilities beyond childcare as time passes by.

7.1 Couple finance and household decision making

7.1.1 Household and couple finance

As discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.2, women's income and having dual earners in a family become more important parts of maintaining an acceptable standard of living in the context of increasing living costs. However, it should also be noted that according to a majority of the interviewees, their male partners are still the primary household income providers, and they usually are not expected to earn an amount equal to or more than their partners. According to their descriptions, their income is often recognised as a 'supplement' to the income from the male partners, allowing the household to live a 'more comfortable life'. Consequently, women's economic contribution to the family has not been elevated to be perceived as equally necessary and valuable to that of the male partner, particularly with the persistent couple income gap between women and men. This sub-section focuses on how women perceive the value of different forms of household contribution and how they have practised these perceptions in managing household finance.

When discussing household finances, women in this study shared their experiences in managing the household and individual income and deciding whose responsibility it would be to cover different types of household expenditure. Some couples perceive their paid work incomes to be the most important source of self-determination and the capability to negotiate an equal conjugal relationship and division of household work. Such couples are more likely to prioritise the value of stable income than unpaid care provision as the most critical contribution to the family. Couples who recognise a stable income as the family's main contribution equalise the amount of income with the amount of power in household decisions making. In this pattern, although the couple often manages their incomes independently, how to and who will cover different types of household expenditure still feature gendered practices.

These couples also have a comparatively distinct division of financial responsibility. For instance, the male partner pays larger amounts of household expenditures, such as the mortgage and tuition fees for children; the woman is responsible for regular household expenses, such as daily grocery shopping. According to women's experiences, this division of financial responsibilities often turns into an overarching gendered division of labour: men prioritise paid work as primary income contributors and women in charge of household work as supplementary income contributions. The interviewees reported that they also consider the income ratio. Women with lower incomes contribute less to household expenses. For instance, Sue (33 years old), a part-time employee with two children (aged four and seven years), commented:

> I pay the daily grocery cost. Then I end up making decisions for all these things I am responsible for paying for, mostly housework and cooking. Sometimes he complains that he (Sue's husband) has covered the largest household expenditure in paying the mortgage, and he thinks he has contributed more to the family than me. (Sue, 33, two children aged four and seven, rural, part-time work, partnered household)

Sue's partner earned a higher salary (around three times more than hers); Sue chose to work part-time when fulfilling increasing childcare responsibilities became the priority after her second child was born. As a secondary earner, she felt less powerful in household decision making. Sue found it uncomfortable when her husband stressed his financial contribution to the household while ignoring her unpaid care, parenting and housework, which is not measured by salary income. According to Sue's experiences, the couple's income gap potentially generates unequal household decision making power. Unpaid care work at home has not been valued as much as financial income through paid work.

During the interviews, similar to Sue, some stay-at-home mothers and other working mothers with part-time work have shared similar concerns and frustration of having less self-determination if there is a larger couple income gap. They face more challenges in negotiating their autonomy when making personal and household decisions, such as changing their employment status. Emma's experience elaborates on the reproduced gendered practices under the interaction between a limited budget for private childcare services and a considerable couple income gap. Living in Guangzhou city, Emma (40 years old) has two children aged 4 and 7. She has shown her financial calculation about how being a stay-at-home mother might benefit the household finance the most. Although money is prioritised in these calculations and decisions in the division of labour, the expectation of being a good mother and spending quality education time with dependent children also reshapes these gendered practices (see more discussions in section 7.3).

> If I were to work, I would probably earn about 4,000 yuan [appx. 480 GBP] a month. My husband earns around 8,000 to 10,000 yuan [1,000-1,100 GBP]. There is no reason for him to sacrifice his time and energy in the family to support me in getting a job. He also said that if the working hours are from 9 am to 5 pm, I might not be able to look after the family properly. The education of the children may be delayed. The money I earn might be insufficient to compensate for the children's tuition fee for extra tutoring courses. (Emma, 40, two children aged four and seven, urban, partnered household, stay-at-home mother)

Under a strong gendered division of labour at home, many stay-at-home mothers in this study emphasised the necessity of having an in-depth conversation with their partners to ensure their care work is respected and valued in the family. According to their descriptions, mutual trust and understanding are essential in making them feel secure and comfortable when they do not have stable salaries and social security insurance. Wenxi (40 years old) lives in the city and has three children aged 1, 13 and 15. Wenxi decided to be a stay-at-home woman after her second child was born. Her parents-in-law were in poor health at that time. She and her husband had been exhausted from committing the paid work with fixed working hours and dual care responsibilities for children and parents-in-law. She found that she could still have the final say in the family as a stay-at-home mother, even though she did not have a salary income. Wenxi found it lucky that her husband valued her contribution to the family and actively engaged in childcare and parenting activities after finishing paid work. In addition, her husband regularly transfers most salary income to her bank account as a form of ‘salary’ for taking care of the children and the whole family.

> I feel that I am financially and emotionally secure because my husband and my children both recognise and respect my contribution to the childcare and housework for this family, although I do not really ‘earn’ money from the labour market. Their respect and understanding of my devotion to the family are why I chose to be a stay-at-home mother. It has been ten years, and I think I will keep looking after my family

> full-time. My husband always said he could not earn this money if I did not support him by managing the family and children so well. (Wenxi, 40, three children aged one, thirteen and fifteen, urban, stay-at-home mother, partnered household)

Even though Wenxi is sometimes stressful about being responsible for managing the household income, having this responsibility has given her more financial security and makes her feel less worried about being a stay-home-home mother without a salary income. Within the family, stay-at-home mothers' sense of security depends on the stability of conjugal relations and how family members, particularly the male partner, perceive the equal value of paid and care work. In this case, financial income is not the only source of self-determination in negotiating equal gender relations at home. Even though they have recognised the equal value of paid and unpaid household work, the existing institutions and policy practices, particularly the employment-based social security (see Chapter 6, sub-section 6.3.2), bring up more potential socio-economic risks for stay-at-home mothers under this strong gendered division of labour at home. As highlighted in Chapter 2, Section 2.3, middle-aged women are more disadvantaged in a competitive labour market that values young labour with more time and energy to devote to work (Liu, 2007b). These women undertaking full-time care work during their late thirties and forties are more likely to be positioned in a vulnerable situation with limited paid work experiences once the conjugal relationship is broken down.

More couples have recognised and perceived the important value of care and housework. However, the policy practices do not institutionally and financially support these perceptions and the contribution of sharing family responsibilities. In addition, there are no exact rules on how unpaid care work should be financially calculated in specific cases. In the Civil Code of the People's Republic of China[33] published and implemented in 2020, there is one item (No. 1088) highlighting the economic compensation for those with more care responsibilities in the family: ‘If one of the spouses is with more duties such as raising children, caring for the elderly and assisting the other spouse in his or her work, he or she has the right to request compensation from the other spouse upon divorce, and the other spouse shall give compensation. The specific method shall be agreed by both parties; if the agreement fails, the people's court shall decide' (Civil Code of the People's Republic of China 2020). From a legal perspective, Wu, the lawyer and legal consultant with expertise in family policy and marriage law, commented that this rule still has an ambiguous measurement of the economic value of the contribution from the care provider. There is no clear definition of how a stay-at-home mother's economic contribution is measured when dividing the couple's property and finance. In Wu's opinion, more than the No. 1088 item in the law, unpaid household work needs to be appropriately measured with more details and regulations in the existing marriage law.

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[33] On May 28th, 2020, the Thirteenth National People's Congress voted to publish and implement the Civil Code of the People's Republic of China, which will come into effect on January 1st, 2021. As a result, the Marriage Law, Inheritance Law, General Principles of Civil Law, Adoption Law, Security Law, Contract Law, Property Law, Tort Liability Law and General Principles of Civil Law are repealed and replaced at the same time.

> Due to the lack of regulations and detailed calculation of unpaid care conducted at home, it is risky for women to be full-time caregivers. In this case, women can face more risks of losing financial compensation. In addition, if women are unfamiliar with the Marriage Law (now the Civil Code), they are often easily trapped in disadvantaged situations, for example, losing the shared house and bank saving or only receiving a very small amount of shared property, once they face a marriage breakdown. (Wu, Legal Consultant in the Urban Government Legislation Committee)

In terms of spatial variations, most urban couples have shared a comparatively equal share in household finance contributions and recognised the equal value of paid work and care work. Due to the increasing cost of living, urban women often highlight the equal importance of both women and men in maintaining household finance and earning a higher salary. In contrast, women from the rural case study location generally recognise their husbands as the family's primary financial sources. There are also nuanced variations among rural women regarding which kind of economic source and security are valued more. According to some rural interviewees with formal employment, the stability of formal employment and the entitlement to social security are perceived as more important sources of self-determination and bargaining power in the context of the precarity in the labour market and the lower welfare coverage in rural China. Lili (33 years old) has a six-year-old child and works in the local government in Village L. She highlighted that the stability of the job with formal employment status is more important than having a higher salary income. Therefore, despite not earning as much as her partner, she feels her stable employment and the guaranteed social security insurance, as a safety net for the family, significantly support her power in personal and household decision making.

> My husband's job is not as stable as mine, which is project-based. Even though my husband does earn more than me, at least 2-3 times more, he and my parents-in-law would not ask me to resign to look after my child. That is because in China nowadays, a stable job and social security are important and hard to get. Salary income level is not the only thing we consider. (Lili, 33, one child aged six, full-time work, rural, partnered household)

7.1.2 Fertility decision making: Conditions, motivations and love

As a critical aspect in practising self-determination for the mothers interviewed in this study, fertility decision making reveal women and their families' autonomy in response to Chinese socio-economic transitions in family formation. As highlighted in Chapter 5, Section 5.1, although there is a declining fertility rate in contemporary China, there are nuanced variations across different groups of people. The discussions about interviewees' fertility decisions centre on when to have their first child and why to have second or more children. According to women's lived experiences, 'condition' refers to the available family resources, childcare services and more stable employment status. It is the most frequent term they use to describe their decision making when having the first child. Some interviewees decided not to have a second child due to lacking these 'conditions'. In the previous literature, such scholars as (Feng et al., 2020) have discussed the impact of resource dilution on how people understand and practice their reproductive behaviours. With limited resources, when considering childbirth, the younger generation is becoming more pragmatic about using the available resources and maintaining their current quality of life rather than following traditional social norms (Jia and Yu, 2019).

Living in the city, Ting (29 years old) recognises the challenges of maintaining job security with a stable income as the most important reason for not having a second child. Contributing half of the household income for the family, she is worried that having a second child can affect her paid work and then the household income. And therefore, they might have to compromise their current quality of life. She commented,

> I could not find any economic conditions or motivation for having one more child. Maintaining childcare for one child has been very challenging with such short maternity leave (6 months). Having a second child means I have to face these challenges once more. My household finances do not allow us to take this risk. Compromising the current quality of life to have more children is not realistic either. (Ting, 29, one child aged two, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

The confidence and self-determination in maintaining an independent retirement life have also affected how women understand and practice their fertility behaviours. When comparing the income source for rural and urban older people, rural older people rely more on family support, mostly from adult sons, as their primary livelihood due to a lower social security coverage rate (see Chapter 5, sub-section 5.1.3). Dependence on family resources and the practices of family reciprocity have made adult children part of the risk management strategy. According to some rural interviewees, having a child has become a paradoxical act that brings financial pressure at a young age but an extra layer of financial security and support for retirement. When discussing the decision to have a second child, Sha (38 years old), who lived in the village with two children aged 3 and 13, shared her hesitation and motivation to have her second child three years ago. With concerns about not having social security coverage in her husband's current job, she described her expectation of financial and care support from the children in the future.

> Although I can understand that children do not necessarily stay nearby, we still somehow expect financial and care support, as a family safety net, from our children in the future. When we get older and lose the ability to work, my husband and I might rely on savings with the limited pension in rural areas. But what if we do not have enough savings? Particularly, my husband's job does not give him social security coverage. Then our children are the ones who will provide some financial support; they are a kind of 'insurance' for our old age. (Sha, 38, two children aged three and thirteen, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

Due to the uncertainties in the labour market and the lower coverage rate in social security for some Chinese families, having (more than) one child is still recognised as important for receiving family support in the future. These discourses and fertility practices match the traditional Confucian values highlighting large families for prosperity and family solidarity across generations, which is a result of the scarcity of public services and welfare instead of compliance with traditions. In this context, regarding fertility decisions, there are still unchanged beliefs and practices that the next generation in the family is an important risk mitigation source to compensate for the state's retreat in welfare provisions.

Unlike the rural discourse, urban women hold more diverse and different opinions about fertility decisions, whether on having only one child or having more children. Some of the better-off urban respondents linked their decision to have children to their love for them. They disagreed with the idea that having an additional child can reduce the risk of unexpected events in the future. As parents, these interviewees did not expect their children to reward their care and parenting contribution when the interviewees entered their older years. With guaranteed social security from her husband and her jobs, Chenyan (39 years old), working in an urban SOE, was more confident in having an independent and financially stable retirement life without relying on her only child.

> If not worrying about my life quality and the ability to circumstance risks after retirement, having one more child is a decision out of my love and availability. Personally, receiving financial and care support is not the main reason for having more children. My income and social security can guarantee my financial independence even after retirement. (Chenyan, 39, one child aged eight, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

Their stable employment status and income affect these expectations of independent intergenerational relations. Financial independence and the ability to handle risks gave Chenyan more self-determination in not having more children. How urban, young and middle-class women discuss intergenerational expectations and obligations has reflected a shift towards more equal and independent family relations across generations. They are less likely to expect financial rewards or physical care from their children in the future. However, these changes do not apply to all Chinese families, at least not always in rural China. Those with limited resources in access to social security and stable employment status may have higher expectations related to both childcare and financial support from the next generation, motivating them to have more children as a ‘risk management plan’. By comparing rural and urban women, these lived experiences in fertility decisions have also reflected the implication of the dual-tracked welfare provisions and social security coverage rate on affecting the motivations behind the different family formation and the understandings of family as welfare providers.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.1, policy stakeholders have mostly perceived fertility practices from the condition, instead of motivation, of having children: why people can have more children or cannot have more children. Their shifting services provisions and working strategies are intended to comply with the shifting population strategies, from discouraging fertility in the one-child policy to encouraging fertility in the relaxation to two (and more)-child policy. However, in women’s lived experiences, these family planning policies are not as influential as before. A number of interviewees have their first child before their 30s. However, when to have and whether they would like to have a second child have varied across different age cohorts. These demographic specifications show the convergence of the life course of having their first child between the mid-20s to late 20s. However, when to have and whether to have a second child are full of uncertainties, making women’s experiences vary not because of their age cohorts but the age of their youngest child. For some interviewees, there is a large birth interval between the first child and the second child under the universal two-child policy in China. In the modernisation process, different groups of women have more diverse motivations and a higher level of self-determination in fertility practices. In women’s narratives, fertility decision making combines love and cost-benefit calculation dynamically shaped by their available resources, shifting social norms, and uneven welfare provisions across rural and urban China.

7.1.3 Intergenerational interactions: Prolonged dependence and the ambiguous boundary

The interaction between the nuclear family and their older parents (in-laws) is often the focus when discussing intergenerational relations. These interactions include sharing childcare, different forms of living arrangements (see Chapter 6, section 6.1), and exchanging financial resources, particularly property rights. The existing property regulations and practices in Chinese marriage law have promoted women’s self-determination, at least in urban China, in making critical life decisions involving household property and finances. However, in rural China, village rules still manage and regulate how a family is formed and lived and how property rights are recognised. When it comes to property rights, communal land in rural China is often shared among those in the same household with multi-generational family members. Due to the unchanged village rules, women living in rural areas are more disadvantaged in that they do not own individual property because adult women are not entitled to inherit communal land as an independent household. In this case, women are recognised as new family members via marriage, and they join the household run by the male family member, either the father-in-law or the husband. Household separation/nuclearisation (*fenjia*[34], 分家) refers to the separation of finance, including shared family business, housing and communal land entitlement between two generations.

In rural areas, household decisions are also closely connected to extended families if the household has not carried out a process of household separation under the communal land system. By exerting this step, the nuclear family has more decision making autonomy in handling the communal land and as an independent household. According to the data collected from the fieldwork, more than half of the rural interviewees still did not experience household nuclearisation; they lived with their parents-in-law in the same house and were financially connected to them. They found that they had less independence in decision making and had to ask for permission from their parents-in-law before making money-related household decisions. As wives and daughters-in-law, women had even less autonomy in making these decisions, and the father-in-law made most decisions in this case. For instance, Xian (29 years old), a woman with two children (aged one and three years), commented:

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[34] *Fenjia* in rural China adds one more layer of family solidarity. Family separation also remains one of the most important events in family politics, as it marks the re-definition of rights and obligations between family members, the redistribution of family property, and the formation of new families in rural families.

> Because we did not separate the household finance from that of the parents-in-law, the benefit from the village and the rent earned from the communal land is still shared and goes into my father-in-law's account. For the communal land in the village, if we want to sell or rent out the land, we need to get signatures from everyone in the household, especially the parents-in-law. We also use this shared land to run a small family business (a grocery store) together. Therefore, decisions relevant to household finance, such as building a house, expanding the family grocery store, renting the communal land out or refurbishing the current flat, are predominately decided by my parents-in-law. (Xian, 29, two children aged one and three, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

In this study, three rural interviewees who experienced divorce commonly share their difficult and struggling scenarios affected by this land and shared property system in rural China, which undermines their property rights and equal treatment regarding household finances. If the nuclear family does not experience household separation, it is more difficult for the woman to claim her share of the land and house because this claim requires the agreement of all family members in the household, including not only the ex-husband but also the parents-in-law. Living in the village, Xiao (37 years old) divorced three years ago and has two children aged 7 and 9. Before the divorce, her nuclear family lived with her parents-in-law in a shared house where the property ownership was supposed to be shared equally across all family members. However, after she got divorced and, with her household registration status, moved out of this family, she needed her ex-husband and ex-parent-in-law's consent to claim the property rights. She shares challenges in securing her property rights.

> The lawyer tried to talk to my ex-husband and urged him to divide the ownership of the house. My ex-husband and his parents refused to follow the rule and shouted at me, saying that I did not belong to their family once we divorced, and I did not have the right to claim the property. (Xiao, 37, two children aged seven and nine, full-time work, rural, single-parent household)

Instead of moving towards an equal direction in modern society, rural women are still disadvantaged in their property rights because of the unchanged village rules and the interaction of public and private patriarchy practised in families and the wider rural community (also see discussion in Chapter 5, sub-section 5.3.3). Especially for the dividend from communal land, a male family member—husband, father or father-in-law—usually receives and allocates these household benefits. For rural women, their property rights are based on the condition of marriage, which puts a divorced woman in a passive position when it comes to claiming her rights and benefits within a household led either by her ex-husband or her father-in-law. The complication of accessing property rights and communal benefits belonging to women makes women more hesitant to leave an unhappy marriage, which they know will result in a disadvantage when it comes to achieving financial independence. These experiences show that persistent son preference and patrilineality still make men more likely to inherit more wealth, particularly homeownership and land assets, than women, under the interaction between the unchanged rural regulations and social norms. This process features the penetration of public patriarchy in regulations and policy practices to private patriarchy in family life, which disadvantages women in different dimensions.

In urban China, housing and property rights are also always the spotlight in the complications of the ambiguous boundary in intergenerational interactions. In this study, a majority of the interviewees and their nuclear families shared their experiences of having a close financial connection with the older generation, particularly the parents (in-laws), in property ownership. Although urban households do not need to consider household separation as a solution to claim back financial autonomy and self-determination, urban women still receive different kinds of financial support from the extended family, particularly in the down payment for purchasing a house. Some urban interviewees shared their experiences in accommodating different opinions and interventions from parents and parents-in-law after receiving financial support from the extended family. At the same time, financial reliance on the parents (in-laws) makes young couples more challenging to negotiate the boundary between the nuclear and the extended family. Ting (29 years old), a woman who lived in the city and had a newborn baby, exemplified this family relationship. After providing financial support, her parents-in-law (living in a town 100 miles away) expected high involvement in Ting’s childcare, parenting and living arrangements. Financial reliance on the older generation weakened her self-determination in maintaining an autonomous household. She commented:

> We planned to buy a flat in the city, but our savings were not enough for the down payment. My parents-in-law paid part of the down payment, and then we could settle down in the city faster. However, I find that my mother-in-law always talks about their support when she wants us to do something for her, for example, visiting them more often or inviting her to stay with us for a longer period. If we had not accepted their support, it would have been challenging for my husband and me to manage the financial stress. However, the price is compromising some autonomy of our nuclear family. (Ting, 29, one child aged two, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

Within these intergenerational interactions, women think their autonomy to make more independent decisions for their nuclear family is violated and recognise a clearer boundary between nuclear and extended families. However, in this process, the older parents are more likely to perceive their adult children, grandchildren and themselves as a family unit in which they can get involved with more household decision making. There are mismatched understandings of ‘family’ and ‘family unit’ across these different generations, generating the tensions of securing and compromising self-determination when negotiating the boundary between nuclear and extended family.

These intergenerational interactions in property and sharing financial resources also complicate the legal issues in couple finance. As a result, there have been ongoing adjustments in Marriage Law, Inheritance and Property Law, for example, how to divide couple finance and recognise women’s property rights and unpaid care work contributions, aligning with the social changes. These changing regulations in law have required women to increase their legal awareness and respond proactively to these emerging changes in the law. Xin, a community lawyer and consultant for the government legislation committee in the urban area, specialises in marriage law and provides legal advice on handling family affairs and protecting women’s rights. Xin has pointed out that there are increasing complications in solving divorce cases and couple finance in legal practices. She took house property as a typical example of why women are easier to be trapped in poverty after divorce.

> For example, the older generation buys the house for their adult child, mostly their son, entangles intergenerational fortune with the couple's finances in a nuclear family. These financial connections across generations, between extended family and nuclear family, constantly bring up more complications when negotiating women's property rights in this nuclear family. Suppose women's contributions to this family, particularly through unpaid care work, are not calculated. In that case, women are often disadvantaged in their property rights and other financial compensations under the involvement of the last generation. (Xin, community lawyer for women's welfare and family affairs in the city)

As both women's and the stakeholder's experiences show, when discussing intergenerational interaction in household finance and property, they often refer to women's parents-in-law's involvement while rarely mentioning women's natal families. These findings resonate with the transformation of patriarchy discussed in previous research (Chen et al., 2014; Won and Fong, 2014; Ling, 2017; Ta et al., 2019) that there are changes in how patriarchal traditions are performed, but son preference practised through patrilineality and patrilocality continues. As the communal land in rural China is allocated on a household base, rural women are more likely to continue practising patrilocality through intergenerational co-residence or quasi-coresidence with their in-laws. In the context of the unchanged institutionalised land regulations in rural China and men as primary homeowners in social norms, financial resources are still unavoidably concentrated on men. In urban China, this patrilocality continues through the reliance on male partners' older parents to afford a house down payment before marriage. It, therefore, continues the intervention from old parents-in-law on women and their nuclear families, as a transforming form of patrilocality across locations, through financial resources transfer.

Women and their family's financial reliance has highlighted the prolonged dependence of the younger generation on the older generations. These prolonged dependences on access to property ownership reinforce the patrilocality by normalising that men are responsible for purchasing houses. The expectation of men to purchase property before marriage seems to relieve women's financial responsibilities. However, as policy stakeholders' discussions in Chapter 5, sub-section 5.3.3, it is disadvantaging women by marginalising women's property rights and resources. As central concerns in couple finance, housing and homeownership are closely connected to welfare, including reduction of living costs and offset social risks of being homeless (or houseless) under limited social protection and public services (Croll, 2006). In this study, women's dilemmas and concerns in daily experiences also show that these gender gaps in access to homeownership potentially enlarge the welfare gap between women and men in the long term.

7.2 Dependence and compromise: An exchange for future independence

7.2.1 Receiving more support from the parents: A change worth celebrating?

No matter through receiving childcare support or financial resources from the parents (in-laws), family support is important and often central to women's strategies in maintaining care arrangements and labour market participation more autonomously (see Chapter 6, section 6.1). Due to patrilocality and the persistent social norms of son preference, these family supports are normally from men's families. However, in this study, both urban and rural interviewees revealed that they had also received childcare support from their natal families, especially their mothers. Because of the increasing demand for childcare services over time and the strict implementation of the one-child policy, it is more acceptable for a married daughter, especially as the only child in a family, to live with her parents and provide mutual support. This implies the shift of an increasingly equal role between sons and daughters in sharing childcare support from older parents.

With a smaller family size, women's natal families have more energy and time to provide childcare to their married daughters, which provides less space for the practices of traditional Confucian values of son preference and its emphasis on resources, including practical and financial support concentrating on the son. Having one child also means the family only has one child to support, and more available family resources can be allocated to that child, regardless of the child's sex. In this case, women receiving support from their natal family have more time, energy or financial autonomy to maintain their care relations and manage their choices in careers. This change also promotes women's self-determination in practising their desired working patterns and parenting styles. For instance, Chunyan (29 years old), a mother with two children aged four and six who had a part-time job and lived with her parents in the city, commented:

> My husband and I started our careers in the city I grew up in. That is why we settled down here, and more importantly, I can look after my parents; meanwhile, they can provide childcare support when my children are still young. It was a practical decision, and my parents are happy that I can spend time with them. My parents also have more understanding and empathy when it comes to my difficulties, for example, financial stress and the childcare responsibilities for two young children. (Chunayan, 29, two children aged four and six, urban, part-time work, partnered household)

Living with a woman’s natal family challenges the traditional perception of patrilineality that highlights the woman’s role as part of the husband’s family and their detachment from the natal family after marriage. In women’s lived experiences, practicality becomes a critical principle of arranging intergenerational support and resources to share childcare responsibilities. This principle promotes a form of a mutually supportive intergenerational relationship between women and their older parents, which was not prevalent in a large family or among those with male siblings. This process emphasises the practicality of providing available family resources for adult children in need rather than being decided by the gender differences between son and daughter in the traditional social norms.

Intergenerational co-residence is not the only way to receive parents’ support for women. Other interviewees who were not living with their parents discussed childcare support from the natal family living nearby. Yi (29 years old), a rural resident, had a two-year-old child and worked full-time in an SOE; she had a decent salary and guaranteed social security. In rural China, according to the patrilocal practices, it is more common to live with parents-in-law and therefore receive childcare support from the in-laws. However, in Yi’s case, the family support from her in-laws was unavailable because childcare responsibilities for other grandchildren occupied them. At the end of her maternity leave, she was hesitant to resign because of the security and stability of her current job. She was also worried about the financial stress of hiring a professional babysitter to look after the baby if she kept her full-time job. Luckily, her mother was willing to look after her baby when she was at work.

> My mum was 53 and decided to retire two years earlier because she wanted to help share my childcare. However, I know that my mum can still work for at least five more years and live a more relaxed life. She does not want me to quit my job with guaranteed social security or spend too much money hiring a stranger to look after my child. Also, hiring a person to look after the baby might cost nearly 60% of my salary, which will not be affordable for my family. (Yi, 29, one child aged two, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

It turns out that Yi can have substantial autonomy in managing her care relations and maintaining a dual-breadwinner family when her mother is willing to compromise in her personal life. Her mother has taken early retirement and risks her financial independence in exchange for more autonomy for her daughter to continue the full-time paid work. Family support, perceived as the primary solution to properly managing care relations and paid work, has given mothers more self-determination in keeping their full-time job. However, this self-determination are at the cost of the choices among those women in the older generations, particularly the mother and mother-in-law.

The availability of childcare support from the natal family also gives women more self-determination in rejecting the unwanted intergenerational tensions with their parents-in-law. For example, living in the city, Qianxin (27 years old), working full time with two children aged three and six, decided to move away from the parents-in-law's house due to different living styles and parenting styles of educating children. Her parents' full support in picking up and delivering her two children gives her more self-determination. Additionally, when dealing with in-law relations, receiving more support and resources from parents has given women more autonomy to adjust their care arrangements and plan for paid work.

> I am grateful to my parents-in-law for taking care of my children, but we often have arguments in daily life. Luckily, I have my parents' support as a backup plan, which gives me great courage to alleviate these tensions with my parents-in-law and move out. (Qianxin, 27, two children aged three and six, full-time work, urban, partnered household)

In contemporary China, family support from the natal family is an alternative solution for sharing childcare responsibilities beyond in-laws. This shifting family relation between daughters and natal family alters the myth of son preference and the assumptions of the detachment of married daughters from their parents. Women gain more childcare support to promote their self-determination in daily life with more choices in care arrangements. These changes reflect the progress in equal gender practice between sons and daughters in contemporary Chinese families. However, receiving more support from the natal family, this transformation has not brought radical changes in traditional gender roles or the socially expected motherhood in care provision. From a temporal perspective, childcare responsibilities are not commonly shared by the male or other public or private childcare services but shifted from the younger mother to the older mother. The practices of son preference and patrilocality are challenged, while the gendered practices in motherhood and gendered division of labour in care do not experience a significant change.

Intergenerational support from women's mothers is getting more common than in the past; while shaped by the dual-track welfare and labour market in rural and urban China, this support varied across rural and urban mothers. From a spatial perspective, those older mothers living in rural China are more likely to opt-out of their current job because of the lower social security coverage rate and higher informal employment rate in rural China. According to the rural interviewees living close to their natal families, they more often receive childcare support from their mothers. In Yi's case discussed above, her mother works in the informal labour market and has irregular working hours in rural China. Instead of letting Yi resign from a stable job, Yi's mother gives up her job to support Yi's self-determination in labour market participation and share childcare responsibilities with the family at lower costs. While in urban China, older mothers might prefer providing financial support. For example, with two children aged two and four, Cheyyan (27), working part-time, receives financial support from her mother. With a full-time job with guaranteed social security and a promising career path, her mother is unwilling to give up her stable job and public pension after retirement in the city. With a better-off financial condition, she can provide financial support to ease Cheyyan's financial pressure in hiring a babysitter to share the childcare responsibilities.

> My mother's job is stable, and she really enjoys her job. She wants to work until her official retirement age (55 years old), and she can get a higher public pension. Currently, she prefers to sponsor me financially to hire a babysitter instead of resigning from her job to help with childcare. I can totally understand that and appreciate this financial support. (Cheyyan,27, two children aged two and four, urban, part-time work, partnered household)

7.2.2 The two-child policy and more: Are family resources available for everyone?

As mothers' diverse care and paid work arrangements are shown in previous sections, different allocations of family resources elaborate on the family's flexible coping strategies to maximise household interests in responding to the demographic and socio-economic transitions. However, with the implementation of the two-child policy in recent years, the practicality of relying on family resources and equally allocating family resources between adult sons and daughters might show a mixed picture. This sub-section discusses the varied challenges of access to family support and its implications on different groups of women's self-determination.

According to most interviewees, with the implementation of the two-child policy and even the three-child policy, it became difficult to guarantee that the cultural norms of son preference would not be resurrected, with sons' needs being prioritised again. Living in rural China with well-rooted son preference traditions, Bing (31 years old) experienced this dilemma despite living and working near her natal family. Bing's second child, a daughter, and her brother's second child, a son, were born in the same year. Her mother preferred looking after the grandson and could not handle two babies simultaneously. Finally, compromising a distant care relationship, Bing had to send her younger daughter to live with her parents-in-law in a village more than 100 miles away. As Bing's experiences reveal, receiving support from a natal family requires a number of pre-conditions, including the parent's availability and the adult child having fewer, particularly male, siblings.

> My job is in this town, and my parents-in-law are unwilling to come here. I normally visit my younger child and my parents-in-law during the holiday. I can understand that

> my mum prefers grandson since son preference is still evident in the village. When there are more grandchildren, childcare is shared with order and priority. (Bing, 31, two children aged three and five, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

After the implementation of the two-child policy, Cheng (28 years old) and her husband both wanted to have two children. At the time of the interview conducted, Cheng had two young children, aged two months and two years, and she was still on maternity leave. However, with the increasing childcare responsibilities, she found that looking after two young children was too tiring for her parents-in-law, who had medical conditions. She also excluded the choice of seeking private childcare services in the market and recognises these services are “not as good as care provided by family”, as many other interviewees have also described (also discussed in Chapter 6 sub-section 6.1.3).

> I might consider whether I should be a stay-at-home mom for a few years until my two children are ready (three years old) for kindergarten. Taking care of young children requires too much energy and time from my in-laws, which is not good for their well-being. (Cheng, 28, two children aged two and two months, full-time work, urban, partnered household)

In the context of heavily relying on older parents (in-law) to share childcare responsibilities, for these women intending to have more children, being stay-at-home mothers or working part-time become their temporary solution once family support is unavailable. Family planning policies are adapted to social development and the changing population structure. However, these policies rarely consider parents’ stress when it comes to childcare provision and the increasing demands of having dual breadwinners to maintain household finance in a competitive labour market. In addition to the support from older parents (in-laws) in general, sibling support is also frequently discussed among rural residents. With more sibling support, rural women seem to have faced fewer challenges regarding the shrinking kindship network. Kui (39 years old), working full-time, has two children aged 9 and 14. She has four siblings, and they all live nearby in the village.

> When I had to work overtime over the weekend or off work late during the weekdays, my sisters and brother can help. They can pick up my children from school and just look after them for several hours. It is really helpful to have such sibling support, which gives me more freedom to continue my current job and career. (Kui, 39, two children aged nine and fourteen, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

As Kui's story shows, her siblings and in-laws are still very supportive, and it is common for them to have more than three other siblings who can mutually support each other. These family supports are not limited to older parents (in-laws) but are more commonly shared with other extended family members living nearby, including siblings, aunts and uncles. Generally, due to the close living distance in the village, rural families potentially maintain a more extended kindship support network, which allows women to share childcare responsibilities with more family members beyond older parents (in-laws). However, urban women's experiences are slightly different. Affected by the strict implementation of the one-child policy, urban families are more likely to be singleton families with small family sizes and less sibling support, particularly among those in their 20s and early 30s. Living in the city and working part-time, Sugar (33 years old) has two children aged 4 and 7. As the only child in her family, sibling support in sharing childcare is not an option for Sugar.

> Sometimes I think it will be great to have siblings. Then I can at least have one more option for sharing childcare, like mutual support. Support from the older parents (in-laws) might be unpredictable because they are getting older and need more time to enjoy their retirement life. (Sugar, 33, two children, aged four and seven, part-time work, urban, partnered household)

Drawn on women's everyday experiences, rural women with remaining comprehensive sibling support networks seem to face fewer challenges than their urban counterparts. However, both rural and urban women commonly experience more uncertainties in how and whether practical family support can continue and be able to share the increasing childcare responsibilities under the implementation of the two-child (2016-2021) and three-child policies (2021-present). Even though there is increasing financial support, not requiring time availability of care providers and geographical proximity between families, this support is limited to those with better-off financial status. As discussed in Chapter 5 Section 5.1, although the family structure and living arrangements have changed and continue to change, the social norms and state's welfare provisions developed on the premise of the traditional family have not changed significantly. Family is important, and in what way and how to maintain family support requires institutional and policy changes to address the emerging uncertainties.

7.2.3 Intergenerational tension: The interaction between traditions and modernity

As discussed in Chapter 6 Section 6.1 and Chapter 7 Section 7.2, women might receive more family resources in sharing childcare responsibilities and thus enhance their self-determination in finance. However, beyond practicalities in terms of time and energy, these intergenerational interactions also bring up more complications in negotiating a clear boundary between the extended and nuclear family and reshaping the gender dynamics within the nuclear family in daily life.

Consistent with Hu and Mu's (2021) research, women's lived experiences explored in this study also show the pattern that the traditional gendered division of labour is more like to be reinforced when the older parents (in-law) are involved with the housework and care work to support the young couple. Different understandings of gender roles have brought tensions between the old and young generations during intergenerational co-residence. Specifically, by imposing and practising a more traditional gendered division of labour, these intergenerational interactions have affected the gender relations within women's nuclear families. Living in the city with her parents-in-law, Hada (29 years old) worked in a senior role in a trading company and had a two-year-old child. She shared her challenges regarding encouraging her husband to participate in parenting the child. She mentioned that her mother-in-law took on all housework and care work and suggested that Hada's husband does not need to be involved with these family responsibilities.

> In my husband's family, women are the people to do the housework and educate the children. My husband gets used to this domestic division of labour and assumes that he is not good at housework and parenting. My mother-in-law also thinks like this.

> Whenever I ask my husband to do housework and spend time educating our child, my mother-in-law always stops him, saying men do not know how to do these things. Gradually, my husband thinks childcare and housework are not his responsibilities. (Hada, 29, one child aged two, full-time work, urban, partnered household)

Living with her parents-in-law afforded childcare and housework support for Hada, giving her more freedom to focus on her career and reserve more energy to spend time with her child after paid work. However, in another aspect, it was challenging for her to manage the nuclear family independently. The traditional gender roles practised every day by the older generations also make it difficult to negotiate the household division of labour with her husband in the way she wanted: equal gender division of labour and more parenting participation from her husband. Reliance on intergenerational support gave her husband an excuse to escape from childcare and housework. Her self-determination in her career is at the cost of the loss of autonomy in changing the practices and remaining perceptions of the gendered division of labour in the family. She described this situation as “the tensions between the traditions and modernity across generations”. With frequent physical contact under the same roof, the traditional perception of gender roles might be reinforced by the older generation and practised daily through housework, childcare and parenting practices.

Living in the village and with a 16-year-old child, Zhang (40) and her husband moved out of the shared house with her parents-in-law after her child reached school age. In this dimension, the reduction of the reliance on older parents’ support in childcare and housework has allowed women to own more self-determination in care arrangements and enhance equal value between paid work and unpaid care work. She commented,

> In the past, when we lived with parents-in-law, my husband did not participate in housework, childcare or parenting together, but now he does. There are fewer interventions and traditional gender roles from the older generations. Even though it is busier and more tiring without family support, it is still worthwhile to get back my say to have an equal division of labour and a more engaging partner. (Zhang, 40, one child aged sixteen, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

This situation is similar to some urban respondents who had retreated from intergenerational co-residence or reduced childcare reliance on older parents (in-laws). According to women's lived experiences in this study, rural and urban variations are not evident in affecting these tensions, while geographical proximity and the level of dependence on family support matter more. As Zhang and Qianxin's (in sub-section 7.2.1) stories show, the age of their children is an important factor that affects their strategy on whether relying on family at the cost of compromising the nuclear family's autonomy or taking on more childcare responsibilities at the cost of the reduction in household income.

Under this day-to-day care and housework support, it is also difficult to maintain an explicit boundary between receiving childcare support and excluding the interventions of parenting practices from older parents (in-laws). Based on the interviewees' descriptions, parents (in-laws) are welcome to look after grandchildren daily, including feeding and bathing. However, the younger generation is less welcoming of certain grandparenting behaviours that fail to match the standard of 'good parenting' practices in a modernised society. In contemporary China, these young parents referred to their expectation of practising 'quality education' in parenting that emphasises children's learning and personality development from an early age.

In terms of their expectations related to formulating good habits from a young age, the interviewees discussed the importance of regulating and supervising children's behaviours in daily life, such as eating fewer sweets and reducing screen time. However, it is difficult for working parents to observe and be aware of how the older generation supervises their grandchildren during grandparenting. In addition, the older generation has different parenting concepts from young parents. For instance, Qin (35 years old) shared her dissatisfaction with her mother-in-law's parenting styles, such as excessively spoiling children. Qin had a five-year-old child and worked part-time; she lived in the rural area with her husband's extended family, including her parents-in-law and an aunt-in-law. Qin hopes a more professional nursery or community service will teach parents and grandparents how to support young children's intellectual development and carry on parenting more scientifically. She also believes that having a shared understanding of 'good parenting' with the older generation can reduce cross-generational parenting conflicts.

> My parents-in-law spoil my child and really cannot educate him properly. It is acceptable for them to prepare food, pick up the children and bathe them. However, they seldom think of educating my son to be polite and self-disciplined in using electronic devices. They think that as long as he is not crying or getting angry, playing on the phone and eating sweets are fine. (Qin, 35, one child aged 5, rural, part-time, partnered household)

Although Qin tried to discuss the negative effect of screen time on children's well-being, her in-laws kept doing things the same way in their grandparenting. Because of these ongoing conflicts brought by different understandings and expectations of parenting styles, she worried about working full-time and leaving her child at home with the grandparents for too many hours per day. To have more self-determination in parenting, Qin chose to work part-time, giving her more free time to educate her son before he started primary school at six years old. When conflicts are irreconcilable regarding different parenting practices across the generations, women find it more challenging to share parenting responsibilities with older parents (in-laws) and re-engage in the labour market.

In these 'unwelcome' grandparenting practices, some interviewees also tried to find a better way to negotiate with their parents (in-laws) to reduce the collisions between more traditional and modern methods and accommodate the different understandings of parenting styles across generations. This process is described as 'negotiation in a harmonious way'. For instance, Luoqing (31 years old) had a two-year-old child and worked as a full-time secondary school teacher in the city. She found that the teaching skills learned from her job were effective in negotiating with her parents-in-law when her in-laws used inappropriate tactics, like spoiling and trickery, to nurture and educate her young child:

> I realised that sometimes my parents-in-law trick my child, saying they will take her to the park if she eats more food or stops crying. However, my parents-in-law have no intention of taking her to the park. With my husband, I had a peaceful conversation with my parents-in-law and set up the principle that we should not lie to the child. If family members lie to the child, the child will learn this and accept this behaviour. I

> would rather my child continue crying or eat less than being tricked or spoiled. There are always other ways to teach the child. (Luoqing, 31, one child aged two, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

The dependence on family support as a primary solution to share care and parenting responsibilities has urged women to accept these collisions between traditional and modern parenting styles. On the one hand, in many cases, young parents do not necessarily have the time, knowledge or energy to communicate these changing parenting values and practices to their parents (in-laws), exacerbating these family conflicts in intergenerational interactions. On the other hand, like Luoqing, many other interviewees also attempt to negotiate a compromised way to secure their independence and self-determination in parenting practices the way they prefer. In the context of limited choices and budget access to the social services in the market, women can not simultaneously have self-determination in all dimensions, including paid work, care relations, parenting practices and independent decision making in everyday lives. Drawn on women's complex and multidimensional experiences, there are often different trade-offs and compromises in some dimensions to have more self-determination in some other dimensions.

7.3 Gendering parenting practices: Guilt and negotiation

7.3.1 Modernising parenting with traditions: Coping strategies in motherhood

Previous sections have highlighted how women's self-determination in finance, property rights, and different decision making are shaped by their available resources and choices. With a focus on the gender dynamics in parenting practices, this sub-section discusses women's central concerns in motherhood and explores how women's gender role as a mother interacts with social norms and gender relations under the interaction of modernisation and transforming Confucianism. As discussed in Chapter 6, for those with children under school age, the challenges in maintaining preferred care relations and arrangements for childcare come in different ways. It is also the case for those with children reaching school age with more demands in parenting and educational activities. In women's narratives, guilt is often a keyword describing their feelings and understanding of parenting practices. These understandings of parenting practices regarding time, quality and additional education resources are closely connected with women's expectation of fulfilling 'good' motherhood.

In contemporary China, fulfilling a 'good mother' role and providing 'quality education' during parenting are closely linked. Developing a good mother role no longer happens within the family in the private sphere. These motherhood and parenting practices have extended to other forms of social integration, including community and volunteer activities and social networks with teachers and other parents. Through these social interactions, women are also expected to be all-round educators and role models with the capability to maintain paid work or an excellent career and manage harmonious family relations. According to some interviewees' experiences in practising motherhood, these role model effects can positively influence their children in learning and socialising. Some interviewees have also admitted their frustration of not being 'good' enough as a modern mother. From the city, Wenxi (40 years old), a stay-at-home mother, shared her frustration and guilt when comparing herself with other mothers with better educational attainment and a senior role in their careers. Even though she was not working in the labour market, she tried to maintain other forms of social networks with teachers, friends and neighbours. She commented that it is critical to maintain a certain level of social life and develop other life skills that benefit better parenting practices for her children.

> Even though I am not working in the labour market, I still participate in some volunteer work in the community and have regular gatherings with other parents. I know some mothers have great educational backgrounds and can maintain good careers. I sometimes feel quite guilty not being able to be such a role model mother for my children. That kind of modern mother image, being capable at work and balancing family well, is inspiring and overwhelming. (Wenxi, 40, three children aged one, thirteen and fifteen, urban, state-at-home mother, partnered household)

In contemporary China, being a modern mother and fulfilling the "good" motherhood role requires women's time, love and care in parenting practices and personal specifications with higher education attainment, better career and up-to-date social interactions beyond family. These changes in mothers' roles reflect the shifting understanding of the importance of mothers in inspiring and educating their children as role models that were previously not recognised as women's responsibilities.

As most interviewees argued, there is also no concrete standard or clear boundary about how much is enough and how "good" one ought to be in fulfilling the parenting role. From the city, Liuyan (39 years old), a senior manager in a private company in the city, lives with her parents-in-law and has two children aged 9 and 10. According to Liuyan, if she wants to proceed to a senior position, it means more time and effort spent in the workplace and less time for family. As a result, when her children reached school age, she gave up her promotion opportunity and ensured more parenting time with her children. She has also planned to reduce paid work hours and spare more time to accompany and educate her children.

> I feel that I did not have enough time to teach my child and facilitate her study after school time. Many children have already known many things at this age, for example, spelling skills. However, my children are still unaware of these and even have some bad learning habits with shorter attention spans and procrastination in finishing homework. I start to believe a proverb that If you want to be a good mother, then it is less likely to be a good employee. (Liuyan, 39, two children aged nine and ten, urban, full-time work, partnered household)

Although with an advanced position in her career, Liuyan faces the guilt of being occupied by her paid work, which is recognised as "not enough to be an excellent mother to provide enough parenting time". When women find it challenging to provide adequate parenting time for their children, they often feel guilty and frustrated. As highlighted in Chapter 5, Section 5.2, longer working hours and competition in the Chinese labour market make paid work and family life less compatible. For those with limited family support, childcare provisions and paid work become a single-choice question (see Chapter 6, sub-section 6.1.2). It is also the case when women attempt to fulfil the demand of paid work and the expectation of parenting practices. In the interviews, women from urban and rural areas commonly recognised that career development and good parenting practices are mutually exclusive.

Both Wenxi and Liuyan's experiences reveal the contradictory scenario in fulfilling the constructed 'good mother' role in parenting practices. As these understandings and parenting practices show, a good mother is expected to have adequate time and energy for parenting and a promising career as a role model. Even though women potentially have more self-determination to choose their paid work and care arrangement after children reach school age, they still feel guilty and obliged to contribute more time and resources to fulfil a good mother role. No matter whether they spend more time pursuing their career development or maintaining perceived 'good parenting' with dependent children, they often feel their decisions are not good enough and struggle to balance multiple and contradictory ideas of what a modern woman should be.

In this process, women potentially internalise the 'good' motherhood identity reinforced by the market (see Chapter 5, sub-section 5.2.1). In the Chinese market economy, the competition in talent, time, and effort, and different forms of gender discrimination make women feel obliged to work harder and sacrifice family to achieve career development. These institutional dynamics and understandings of the relations between developing career and parenting practices in fulfilling motherhood make them often feel guilty and recognise career development and close parenting relations as incompatible. Unconsciously, women undertake their gender performance: recognise the gender pay gap as fair since they have care responsibility (see the discussions in Chapter 6, sub-section 6.3.2) and recognise the constructed incompatibility between career and parenting practices when fulfilling the 'good mother' role. Previously discussed in Section 2.3 of Chapter 2, the 'good mother' is also judged by the outcome of whether these mothers have educated their children to become a competitive talent and part of the younger generation and thus promote national development in the state's narrative (Jin and Yang, 2015; Kuan, 2015; Hanser and Li, 2017). A role is reshaped and re-interpreted under the interaction of market and state, which manifests women's challenges in balancing care, parenting and paid work under these socially constructed expectations and narratives.

However, the coping strategy discussed above, retreating more from paid work, is more evident among urban women and those with comparatively advanced careers and better socio-economic conditions. As highlighted in the current research discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3, quality education and parenting practices are closely connected with socio-economic status and resources. These practices reflect exemplary motherhood and parenting that manifests the intersection of gender and class among middle-class mothers. Some interviewees with financial pressure are more difficult to spare more time from paid work and invest more money in household finance to provide 'quality education' and spare more time in parenting activities as socially expected. They develop a more flexible and self-comfort coping strategy: admitting the "failure". Meanwhile, they autonomously challenge the demanding requests to fulfil a 'good' mother role through these competitive parenting practices. For example, living in Village L, Gangli (37 years old) has two children aged five and six. She commented,

> Both my husband and I need to work full-time to cover household costs. There is no way to pursue quality education or providing quality parenting, such as sending them to extra curriculum classes or tutoring them after school with great patience. These things might belong to rich people. I did feel a bit guilty for my children for not being able to follow these trends, but it does not mean I am not a good mother. (Gangli, 37, two children aged five and six, rural, full-time work, partnered household)

Some urban interviewees also lower their expectations of parenting practices that require more time, energy and money. Instead, they prefer proposing different parenting styles and different styles of motherhood. Working full time, Jiajie (29 years old) lives in the city with her six-year-old child. She criticises the increasing tutoring services outside school that encourage mothers and their families to invest more 'quality' resources and time in educating their children.

> There is not only one standard of being a modern mother or only one way of parenting. Not all parenting practices should follow this as the only way: great time, quality and educational investment. The emerging tutoring services and advertisements will keep telling you no matter how much time, money and energy mothers, it is not always enough. I am trying to be a happy mother with a more relaxed parenting style. (Jiajie, 29, one child aged six, urban, full-time work, single-parent household)

Chapter 2 Section 2.3 discussed that afterschool tutoring and educational services had undergone rapid privatisation and marketisation in the prevalent narrative about quality education and parenting in fulfilling motherhood. In a competitive labour market, this process becomes a competition for talent, family resources and educational investment. As mothers' parenting experiences show, the success of being a good mother and providing 'quality parenting' time, as some interviewees mentioned, is not only for women's business but also for the future good of the whole family and even the national renaissance. Women's varied strategies to or not to fulfil the expectation of practising quality education and parenting have also reflected their struggles and solutions constrained to their available socio-economic resources and gender roles.

Chinese modernisation and privatisation process have reshaped women's modern mother roles as capable employees, household income contributors and good parenting providers. To a degree, these parenting and motherhood demands alienate women as ordinary human beings with limited time and energy in a competitive labour market, if working, and particularly limited public childcare support in contemporary China. As Swidler (2002) critically argues, social norms are not necessarily understood homogeneously and are often reconfigured into personal interpretations and responses. Different groups of women have reinterpreted these 'good mother' roles and (re)negotiated specific strategies based on their available resources. While their varied coping strategies in parenting practices also elaborate on their shared guilt in unfulfilling these multiple roles and responsibilities in contemporary China. Even though the demand for a mother as a role model reflects the progress in recognising the important value of women's paid work and career development, the expectation of quality education and parenting practices still confines women in patriarchal practices highlighting the close connection between women and family responsibilities.

7.3.2 Father's role in parenting: Re-negotiation and awaiting cooperation

Chapter 6 Section 6.2.3 has discussed that males' participation in childcare is affected by their willingness and availability for the family. Regarding parenting practices, most of the time, women are placed in the spotlight when discussing the responsibilities of parenting and fulfilling motherhood. Some interviewees complained that men's long working hours and frequent business trips had become unwritten but compulsory practices in the workplace. Busy working lives meant their male partners often struggled to balance a stable income and the time spent parenting the children. The assumption that men are more devoted to careers also justified male partners' longer working hours and more frequent business trips, making them more likely to leave their fatherhood duties at home unfulfilled while satisfying the breadwinner role in the workplace.

From the city, Chunyan (29 years old), a mother with two children of school age, faced a similar situation. She highlighted that in her family, parenting decisions are made by the people with more knowledge in those areas. In her opinion, she has become more familiar with different information and knowledge to have better ideas and plans. Therefore, the decision making in parenting activities is mostly made and turns out to be undertaken by her. This decision making pattern in parenting adopts the principle of prioritising efficiency because those who have spent more time on these aspects should be more familiar with different types of knowledge, allowing them to come up with better ideas and plans. Chunyan mentioned:

> In terms of parenting and childcare, I want my husband to join in. However, he did not spend much time choosing a school and deciding on a tutoring class, making it more difficult for him to discuss parenting and childcare decisions with me. It also takes up more time for him to re-engage with these decisions. I end up being the person who makes most of the decisions related to the children. (Chunayan, 29, two children aged four and six, urban, part-time work, partnered household)

Among the interviewees, some cases also involve active partner participation in parenting activities. Pushing men's participation in parenting gives women more self-determination in practising equal value in gender roles, equal division of labour and cooperative conjugal relations in the family. Meanwhile, a partner's active participation in parenting allows women to reserve more time and energy to focus on other aspects of daily life and gives women more resources to practice their desired parenting style. Youyou (35 years old), who had a seven-year-old child, valued the impact of the differences in personality, life experiences and expertise between her and her husband. In her opinion, her husband's active participation in parenting, which includes sharing different hobbies and life experiences and using the role modelling effect of being patient, has greatly supported her confidence in building a more supportive and cooperative family environment for parenting:

> My husband's participation in parenting is the most direct support for me in managing positive and balanced parenting relations. Fatherhood and motherhood are two different and complementary aspects. More importantly, cooperating with my husband in parenting gives me more space to think and practice how to manage my relations with my child and my husband. (Youyou, 35, one child aged seven years, full-time, urban, partnered household, migrant)

Frequently raised when discussing parenting practices with the interviewees, the term 'widowed-style parenting' (*sangoushi yuer,* 丧偶式育儿), originally referring to the absence of fathers in childcare and parenting, criticises both the traditional gender roles at home and the gendered division of labour in the workplace, where men are typically expected to be a breadwinner by working longer hours and taking less leave. In addition, the absence of fathers has caused women to experience anxiety in undertaking parenting alone and to be dissatisfied with their conjugal relations and cooperation with their husbands.

There are different gendered interpretations of the value of motherhood and fatherhood in parenting practices, which has affected women's self-determination in how much women should be involved in parenting relations. This term, 'widowed-style parenting', is sometimes interpreted as the disqualification of motherhood in fulfilling good parenting, exaggerating the negative effect of 'incomplete motherhood' on children's well-being when fathers' participation is missing. This emerging biased interpretation tries to justify the value of traditional masculinity in influencing children's well-being and well-developed personalities. The criticism of the expectation that women shall be the primary care providers is reinterpreted as another form of gendered assumption that mothers alone cannot educate good children. For instance, Liuyan (39 years old) shared her worries about the absence of her male partner in fulfilling parenting. Her understanding also reflects that fathers' absence in different stages is perceived differently. Women might accept male partners' absence in childcare participation while expecting more parenting participation from the father when their children reach school age.

> My in-laws and the tutor physically and academically well look after my children. Father might be less important at that stage. However, they need their father's engagement and participation more in everyday education and parenting after they reach school age. They cannot learn the personality of being brave and adventurous from their father because they spend too little time together. Motherhood is different from fatherhood in different ways. (Liuyan, 39, two children aged 9 and 10, urban, full-time, partnered household)

As discussed in 7.3.1, women face the demand of fulfilling a good mother role with devoted time, energy and educational resources spent on children. However, fatherhood is still manifested through their role as household income contributors and is fulfilled by financially supporting their children and the family. The unequal time resources available to both parents also become an instructional and economic factor for the difficulty in changing the gendered parenting practices within the family. These gendered practices manifest the gendered division of labour regarding parenting and education when children are of school age. From a temporal perspective, compared with the early stage when physical nurturing of young children in childcare are more acceptable to be shared with grandparents, women's role as mothers and fathers' role in parenting are reconfigured with more gendered practices when children reach school age.

Conclusion

By focusing on women's multi-dimensional self-determination, as a key theme informed by the human dignity approach, this chapter reveals women's everyday experiences in household finance and decision making, parenting practices and family interactions across these different dimensions. Practical and financial support from older parents (in-laws) provides women more time and financial self-determination to maintain a dual-breadwinner household and potential career development in the labour market. At the same time, this process also comes with compromises in care relations, parenting styles and household decision making.

The combination of specific features in rural and urban labour markets, family planning policies, land/property rules, and gender norms illustrate women's divergence in coping strategies, particularly in the practices of gender roles and intergenerational relationships. Longer working hours and a more competitive labour market to secure a job make urban women work harder to maintain their employment status and develop their careers after becoming mothers. The lack of affordable childcare services and potentially a farther distance from childcare support provided by parents (in-laws) seem to make women with lower average wages or fewer other financial sources stay-at-home mothers for a more extended period after maternity leave. However, in rural China, women are more likely to have a (physically) closer and more extensive family network. Support provided by the extended family is more likely to be an option, which is critical in supporting rural women to continue their paid work. However, due to the lack of policies and resources that value the importance of care as a human need, rural and urban women find it challenging to be a care provider autonomously, whether full-time or part-time, if they intend to maintain a certain living standard. The next chapter, Chapter 8 Discussion, will draw on the board picture based on the findings discussed in this study.

Chapter 8 Discussion: Multidimensionality of everyday lives

Introduction

By applying the human dignity approach focused on fulfilling autonomy and mutuality and integrating gender and temporal perspectives into it, this study has investigated the experiences of women with children through five key dimensions. This chapter brings together the findings in Chapters 5 to 7 and discusses the opportunities for, and barriers to, women with children regarding their human dignity in terms of physical and psychological well-being (section 8.1), care and parenting relations (section 8.2), social integration (section 8.3), self-determination (section 8.4), and equal value (section 8.5). Intersecting with these five dimensions, the analytical layers developed in this approach, including gender and intergenerational interactions, spatial variations and transforming Confucianism, have enabled this study to draw out the multi-dimensional and heterogeneous experiences of different groups of women living in rural and urban China.

8.1 Physical and psychological well-being in a predicament

Informed by the human dignity approach (Chan and Bowpitt 2005), physical and psychological well-being is fundamental to understanding how people can maximise their potential and have ‘health for actions’ (24). Whilst previous discussions on these aspects of human dignity have addressed how unemployed welfare recipients are supported by a minimum standard of living, primary medical care, and help apply for public assistance. In this study, the incorporation of a gender lens, as well as a focus on mothers (in this study, aged 22–40), demonstrates the multiple dynamics, entanglements and interactions that shape their everyday lives in a stratified and patriarchal society. These women’s experiences with multiple roles and responsibilities have shown that maintaining physical and psychological well-being is not a straightforward process but a complex and dynamic one in contemporary China.

In a marketised healthcare system such as that in China, women’s access to physical healthcare depends on their financial affluence, formal employment status and the financial capability of the local government rather than human needs. The lower level of financial assistance in different health insurance schemes between those outside the formal labour market (Residential Healthcare Insurance) and those with formal employment contracts (Employee Health Insurance) is intentionally maintained to distinguish people with different employment statuses. As a result, these institutionalised health inequalities become a challenge that disadvantages those who are not working and those working in the informal labour market, depriving them of their dignity. Meanwhile, in the process of privatisation and the activation of the market mechanism, the central government has dispersed responsibilities to the private sector through the introduction of private health insurance. Particularly in rural China, with limited local finance, the local government has introduced more private and reliable insurance for women to mitigate risks that cannot be fully covered by public health insurance.

For those providing full-time care without formal employment, their lack of financial security and limited access to basic medical insurance exclude them from receiving basic healthcare services. These mothers face more challenges in coping with the cost of maternity check-ups and deliveries in hospitals. They are also not entitled to maternity paid leave or subsidies (up to five months) after having a baby, as formal employees are. Instead of meeting everyone's physical needs and supporting their physical well-being, this labour market dualism creates unequal healthcare access and disadvantages the dignity of women outside the formal labour market. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 6, these stay-at-home or part-time working mothers sometimes feel disappointed that they are not able to prove their financial 'value' and fulfil their potential in the labour market. This dissatisfaction and unfulfilled feeling make them work harder at home by spending more time and effort on childcare, tutoring their children, doing 'perfect' housework and recognising family-related responsibilities as their own.

Regarding mothers with formal employment status, they receive basic medical care insurance and financial security, through which their physical well-being is mostly supported. However, this comes with a trade-off for their psychological well-being. For those in full-time paid work and striving for career development, the social environment-imposed expectations on 'good mothers', making them feel guilty and anxious about being unable to care for their children in the way they perceived 'stay-at-home' mothers did (see Chapter 7, section 7.3). Some mothers who intended to maintain intimate relations with their children found it emotionally struggled to cope with detachment from their babies after maternity leave. Meanwhile, the combination of formal employment status and entitlement to social security insurance pushed these full-time working mothers to stay employed by working harder and sparing more time for the workplace (see Chapter 6, section 6.3). These working mothers mentioned that they were seen as irresponsible mothers and employees who failed to balance and fulfil both roles.

The ambivalence in women’s well-being is also reflected in mothers’ coping strategies; they continue their full-time paid work by compromising their psychological well-being and ‘outsourcing’ their childcare with the extended family. Some mothers working full-time with limited family support did purchase private childcare services in the market; they revealed a sense of uneasiness and distrust about these services (see Chapter 6, section 6.1). In modernising China, most women who participated in this study still prefer relying and trusting on their parents (in-laws) to share childcare instead of relying on private childcare services. However, dependence on parents (in-laws) to provide childcare has also made these mothers face different tensions with older generations regarding traditional and modern care, parenting styles, and household self-determination (see further discussion in next section 8.2). These collisions between old and new generations brought in another layer of psychological concerns and pressure for these women (see Chapter 7, section 7.2).

In urban-rural comparisons, rural and urban women do not have the same life chances and resources to decide how these well-being issues can be solved. Due to the different financial capabilities of local governments in rural and urban China, there are structural inequalities in rural and urban women’s access to primary and quality healthcare services. Rural women experience a lower level of assistance and limited coverage of healthcare services in the villages. Rural domestic migrants, though living in urban China, are not entitled to healthcare insurance and enrolment like the urban locals. This deprivation continually passes on to the next generations if their dependent children mobilise from the village to the city for a family reunion. Due to this welfare exclusion of rural migrants in urban China, most migrant women cannot afford to take their dependent children to live in the city. In this study, the guilt and pressure were felt to be more significant among the rural migrant interviewees living apart from their dependent child children and maintaining distant care relations (see Chapter 6, section 6.2). They thought they had failed to fulfil their motherhood role. These women were further disadvantaged in their physical and psychological well-being due to the regional disparity and divisive welfare system.

In the context of women's unchanged care responsibilities, no matter what women choose, undertaking full-time unpaid care work or full-time or part-time paid employment, women often perceive any of these choices as not fully fulfilling their multiple roles and responsibilities. The lack of public support and institutionalised health inequalities created a sense of frustration, pressure and guilt to do sufficiently well in both paid work and care, as being a modern woman is demanding. In this study, the lived experience of women with children helps broaden the understanding of how well-being is shaped by professional medical support and, more importantly, manifested by the interaction with intersecting layers of spatial variations, gender, age and multiple responsibilities in daily life. The mothers who participated in this study had varied experiences and coping strategies in terms of addressing their physical and psychological well-being. However, the healthcare resources provided by the state and the market are minimal. There is a lack of policy responses to address women's well-being when they bear multiple guilts and pressures in (not) fulfilling care relations, maintaining full-time paid work, and striving for personal development.

8.2 Care relations and parenting: Precarious mutuality

Women's care relations with their dependent children are not recognised as a burden or a crisis but as fundamental human needs. Informed by the argument that the 'life cycle is a cycle of caring' (Chan and Bowpitt 2005: 21), the experiences of the mothers who participated in this study expand the discussions of mothers' care relations with their dependent children and provide insights into parenting that are closely related to care among women at different life stages. This section also elaborates on mothers' changing needs, understandings and practices in care and parenting that were reflected in the recruited interviewees at different ages (22-40) and with children at different ages. These mothers' lived experiences have revealed how their care and parenting needs are marginalised and how they are put in compromised scenarios when making care arrangements.

After the economic reform in the 1980s, China experienced a process of state retreat, and since then, it has been moving towards a more active market. Similar to the privatising healthcare system, nurseries for children under three years old are mostly privatised. The state has also largely retreated from running public kindergartens for those older than three years but not yet at school (see Chapter 5). Although childcare services are not fully regulated or developed, some interviewees still expected that childcare services would reduce their dependency on parents (in-laws) and provide them with extra choices in terms of outsourcing childcare. It is also the case that older parents are able to and prefer to provide financial support for these young couples to purchase private childcare services instead of offering direct childcare after their retirement (see Chapter 6, section 6.1 and Chapter 7, section 7.1). These shifting attitudes and practices emerge more often in urban China, where older parents (in-laws) are entitled to a higher pension rate and able to have a better-off financial condition.

With regard to spatial variations, rural and urban women's varied experiences in maintaining care and parenting relations are also affected by the marketisation process. Since the economic reform, there has been a shift from public rental and work unit house ownership to rapidly growing private homeownership in the Chinese marketisation process. This process has mostly happened in cities and economically-developed towns. According to urban women's lived experiences, those receiving financial support from older parents (in-laws) are more likely to purchase a flat instead of maintaining intergenerational co-residence. Rural China has different land, and housing policies in that village committees regulate and allocate communal land instead of an active market (see Chapter 5, section 5.3). With shared communal land and ownership by the same household, including married sons, male siblings, and older parents, it is more common for rural women to live geographically closer to or with extended families. As rural women's experiences show, receiving childcare and continuing intergenerational co-residence in care arrangements is still the mainstream in rural China.

These increasingly diverse family strategies across rural and urban China reflect more flexible care arrangements under the interaction of the divisive welfare system and the market mechanism. Although urban women can share their care responsibilities with private childcare services, familisation remains a coping strategy (see Chapter 7, section 7.1). Current care arrangements are still heavily reliant on the resources from parents (in-laws) in the form of mainly sharing childcare in the past and, nowadays, a co-existence of childcare and financial support with spatial variations. As Ochiai and Hosoya (2014) argue, Asian familism is diverse in the context of marketisation and privatisation. In the Chinese state-led modernisation process, not only different levels of marketisation but also the policy practices across rural and urban China have shaped the complexity and heterogeneity of how women practise their dependence and independence on family relations.

For the mothers relying on family to share childcare, geographical proximity- living near to or with older parents (in-laws) - becomes critical to maintain intimate relations with dependent children and keep their children nearby. Being close to family is, therefore, a privilege and advantage in this case. However, with the rapid urbanisation process, population mobility has increased the difficulties for women to access family resources in order to share childcare since parents do not necessarily live nearby. Migrant women from rural China face more precarity in maintaining intimate parent-children relations (see Chapter 6, section 6.2). Particularly, they have been disadvantaged regarding access to basic healthcare and educational resources for their dependent children with rural household registration. These institutional barriers and limited access to public support have weakened these mothers' confidence and financial capabilities to address their children's extra education costs and private healthcare if taking their children to live in the cities. As a result, most rural migrant women choose to continue distant care relations with their dependent children, who live in a skipped-generation household with only grandparents. For higher salaries and better careers, these migrants have to accept a more adaptive care arrangement and extend the reach of childcare support far back to the village where their parents (in-laws) live.

These women's experiences in maintaining distant care relations are also contradictory processes. They suffer the loss of intimate parent-children relations while being able to financially support their children's education and health back in their hometown. There is a trade-off between satisfying children's basic needs in education, health and necessities or providing their children more care and parenting time. These mothers' lived experiences highlight the challenges of balancing material comfort, emotional support and spending family time together. As discussed in this study, care and parenting relations broaden the previous focus on the Minimum Standard of Living System for low-income families and their children and parents' financial capabilities to fulfil their essential care duties (Chan and Bowpitt 2005). In this study, these mothers' experiences show that fulfilling their minimal care duties with adequate finance is only part of the everyday practices of maintaining care and parenting relations. Mothers' lived experiences reveal a more multi-dimensional and complex process of making constrained choices whereby different aspects of care and parenting relations might not be fulfilled simultaneously.

As discussed above, rural, urban and migrant women's varied experiences reveal the implications of the rapid urbanisation process and regional disparities in bringing up more precarity in maintaining care and parenting relations. With full support from family, some mothers are capable of balancing their family and work life in the way they prefer. Emerging childcare and after-school tutoring services in the market also support many working mothers to outsource care and education responsibilities with more choices (see Chapter 6, section 6.1). Women's diverse coping strategies have reflected that their care arrangements are often shaped by a combination of practical reasoning and economic resources and conditions. Contemporary China, an increasingly individualised society with prolonged reliance on family support, has generated more uncertainties for women in fulfilling mutuality in care and parenting practices important to their human dignity.

8.3 Social integration: Inclusion and segregation

Social integration refers to recognising individuals' rights as 'social beings' (Chan and Bowpitt 2005: 175), with adequate access to welfare for their participation in social and cultural life. With its focus on labour market participation, this study has revealed women's lived experiences in regard to this dimension and the different forms of social exclusion produced by the urban- and employment-based social security system and the segregation of the Chinese competitive labour market.

Due to the rural-urban divide, the women who participated in this study reflected diverse forms of social exclusion and inclusion in their social and cultural life. Some rural migrants had to return to the village after experiencing different forms of exclusion while living in the city, particularly regarding unequal access to social security insurance for themselves and their child/ren (see Chapter 6, section 6.2). Working in the informal labour market and with limited access to healthcare insurance for themselves and their dependent children, they were marginalised from living in urban China due to inadequate protection, as the locals do. As the migrant mothers' experiences reveal, these institutional barriers and unequal treatment made them feel unwelcome. They felt rejected by the locals and lived in urban China as 'outsiders'. These findings resonate with rural and migrant young people's lived experiences in Xiao and Bian's (2018) research. They revealed that the unchanged household registration system has, and continues to perpetuate, the rural-urban divide and privileged urban residents with better residential social security insurance and more access to formal employment status. Some migrants with higher education attainments have been more likely to settle down in the city and have their reunion with children though these scenarios are not evident among most of the migrant women who participated in this study.

In addition to household registration status, the identity of being a mother becomes a barrier to women's social integration in the labour market. According to their work experiences in the labour market, particularly in the private sector, there is prevalent discrimination against mothers, including a gender pay gap, occupational segregation, and limited promotion opportunities (see Chapter 6, section 6.3). Under the state's strict supervision in the public sector labour market, those working in the public sector are less likely to be marginalised after becoming a mother than those working in the private sector. As most policy stakeholders discussed, the stability of working hours, guaranteed maternity welfare, and breastfeeding leaves form a safety net for women after childbirth. These protection and inclusion measures positively support women's social integration, allowing them to continue to engage in important roles and have adequate time for social and cultural life participation. However, these measures, which are only practised in the public sector, have also reshaped women's image as primary care providers and secondary breadwinners in the market.

In the private sector, employers also consciously reinforce these gender normative views without recognising the value of care by adjusting women's workloads and transferring women to less important roles (see Chapter 6, section 6.3). This is in line with some previous studies that have shown evidence that a flexible schedule with paid work and leave policies that only target women risks enforcing existing gender normative views and feeding into these social expectations (Clark, 2000; Sullivan and Lewis, 2001; Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Clawson and Gerstel, 2014; Radcliffe and Cassell, 2015; Lott and Chung, 2016; Chung and van der Lippe, 2020; Chung et al., 2021). As a result, these measures aiming to support women's integration into the labour market generate more exclusion of women in general and in the long run. In this case, women with care responsibilities might end up filling women-only jobs and exacerbating the occupation segregation that categorises women into jobs that allow flexible working schedules.

Although the state retreats from universal welfare provision, it continues to intervene in family and personal life in an extension of the authoritarian policy practice, including family planning policies, propaganda, and state-led social campaigns. In addition to the discriminatory and divisive welfare system, which distinguishes working and non-working women and rural residents and migrants in cities, the state constructs a narrative to distinguish different 'types' of 'citizens' and families. As Jacka (2009:524) argued in the question of 'boundaries and gradations between different types of citizens, the state constantly reshapes the understandings of what social groups are included for support and determines a set of duties to produce 'ideal citizens'. The state has constructed and reinforced role-model harmonious families for people to follow, including active fertility, supportive family relations and a commitment to national development. Under these narratives, fighting for a financially secure and harmonious family with loving heterosexual couple relations is the 'ideal' and 'mainstream' Chinese family created for people to follow. Meanwhile, it stigmatises and marginalises those who do not fit into these 'ideal' general public and family types, such as divorced women and full-time care providers without paid work in the labour market. The interviewees who had experienced divorce revealed that they were socially excluded and stigmatised when applying for jobs and faced more uncertainties and precarity when switching jobs. In addition, due to the lack of public support and financial pressure, most single mothers worked full-time and had less spare time for their care and parenting responsibilities. Social needs are rarely considered for groups of women requiring more financial and service support in the existing policy practices.

8.4 Self-determination: Constrained choices with autonomy

The initial human dignity approach focuses on the dimension of welfare recipients' self-determination and participation in developing employability through community work and training regulated by the state (Chan and Bowpitt 2005). Self-determination in policymaking participation was not evident among the interviewees in this study. These women with children rarely perceived their self-determination from a political perspective and had few opportunities to influence policymaking and practices. This study expanded the discussion of self-determination beyond political participation and revealed women's self-determination regarding care arrangements, labour market participation and personal development.

As Clark (2000) argues in a previous study, care and paid work arrangements cannot be understood as merely an individual choice. Instead, such decisions result from the transforming gender normative views and the negotiation of other institutional and economic dynamics, for example, the working environment, salaries and the availability of social services. Maintaining a dual-breadwinner household is more important and often prioritised for working-class women to address the high living costs. According to these women's experiences, men alone cannot fully financially support the nuclear family. These nuclear families with young children were more instrumentally and economically dependent on their parents (in-laws) to provide childcare and financial support. Childcare provided by the family gave these women more self-determination in their working schedules. Constrained by their reliance on the older generations, these women, to a different extent, had had to compromise a certain level of autonomy in household decision making and care and parenting styles in their frequent daily contact with parents (in-laws), as discussed in Section 8.2.

According to most interviewees' understandings, dependence on the family in the private sphere is different from dependence on the state and public support in the public sphere. The extent to which women can rely on family support to share unpaid care work affects their availability of time and energy regarding commodifying their labour in the market. They recognise it as acceptable and a temporary family strategy that allows them to accumulate savings, have more spare time and energy for career development and be more independent in the future, even though they have to compromise in terms of having a lower level of self-determination in their care and parenting practices at the moment. In this case, women can accept the sacrifice of their time with children for more self-determination regarding future career development and a higher household income.

There are important gender and intergenerational dynamics that shape women's self-determination to work. Women's self-determination to work is influenced by the availability of female family members in the older generation by providing childcare (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2). In this context, women's self-determination is achieved by relying on other women from the older generation. The lived experiences show that their mothers (in-laws) take on more household work to free up more time for women to perform full-time paid work. However, at the cost of the availability of older women, women's competence and autonomy to maintain a work-life balance do not necessarily challenge or transform the traditional gendered division of labour in the family because women, including mothers and mothers-in-law, are still the group who take on most of the care responsibilities and housework. In line with previous research on the continued and reproduced gendered practice (Liu, 2014; Hare, 2018), shifting care responsibilities to older women might reinforces and reproduce a more traditional gendered division of labour and could potentially disadvantage older women's self-determination in the long term.

Childcare and financial support from the older generations have shown a departure from age seniority and manifested extra resources concentrated on the young generations. These changes indeed provide young women with more time and financial resources to secure their labour market participation and balance paid work and unpaid care work. However, there are still prevalent gendered practices regarding the preference for sons and patrilocality in sharing family resources. In addition to salary and employment status, women's property rights and homeownership become more critical to negotiating equal intergenerational relations and maintaining an autonomous household. Even though there is a lower intergenerational co-residence rate, patrilocality is still practised through the social norms that the house is supposed to be purchased through the husband or financially supported by the husband's parents. As shown in Chapter 7, Section 7.1, the patrilocality in the 'living space', intervened in by parents-in-law, is still carried on through reinforcing male partners' ownership of the property. Patrilocality gets renegotiated through the transfer of financial resources from paternal parents to their sons, not constrained by distance and location. In this case, even though women are not living with their parents-in-law, their decision-making autonomy is also constrained due to unequal property ownership dominated by their male partner and the paternal families.

As the segregation in the labour market shows, females' active labour market participation does not mean that women's equal access and opportunities to paid work are well promoted and achieved at the aggregative level. In the context of limited affordable childcare services (see Chapter 5, section 5.2) and the remaining gender discrimination in the labour market, women and their male partners have to negotiate a more effective, albeit not necessarily equal, division of labour to maximise their time and financial resources to balance paid work and unpaid care work. For most families, it becomes more economically reasonable to let the secondary breadwinner (usually the woman) take more leave and provide care, supporting the male partner to maintain a stable household income. Women then reduce their working hours or adjust to a part-time working pattern to fulfil their care responsibilities and maintain their partners' higher income for the family (see Chapter 6, section 6.3). Most of the interviewees in this study were aware of the importance of an equal division of housework and care work between women and men. However, not all families can practise these equal gender roles and division of labour. Some had shifted to the conventional male-breadwinner family model, particularly after childbirth or when the children reached school age. These findings are consistent with previous discussions in the West (Ciccia and Verloo, 2012; Ciccia and Bleijenbergh, 2014; Mari, 2019).

The practices of traditional gendered roles reveal the reproduction of gender inequality, which is institutionalised and perpetuated by the competitive labour market and the state's retreat in welfare provision. Similar to Xie's (2021) research findings, there is little resistance in daily practices to fight against these unchanged gendered practices in family life. In terms of heterosexual marriage and relations, some interviewees expressed that they also accepted the gendered division of labour and gender order in their family and working life (see Chapter 7); 'it makes life easier', as they narrated. These gendered practices are a cost-benefit decision to maximise the family's time and financial resources. For example, they might share more household work and let their husbands work longer hours with a higher pay rate. Instead of recognising these practices as a reversal of the traditions seen in previous research (e.g., Ji and Wu 2018), this study suggests that these practices can be seen as women's coping strategy within the patriarchal social structure to maximise their household interests (at least financially) in the modernisation process.

More women living in post-reform China receive higher education, and there is increased female leadership, more economic opportunities in choosing their occupations and places to live, and more life chances than before (see Chapter 5). As in Wang and Feng's (2021) and Liu's (2017) findings, the mothers who participated in this study were also more motivated to develop their careers and strive for equal gender roles in the family and the workplace. These women drew on their empowerment and agency to be modern women with more self-determination in different aspects of everyday lives. These gender roles and identities are different from the traditional ones, whereby women were only expected to focus on family life and undertaking care and housework. As shown in the policy stakeholders' working experiences and mothers' lived experiences, there has been a significant shift in the young generation towards being more eager to have a nuclear family and more autonomy in household decision making. Women's experiences also show that their self-determination often comes with constraints and compromises, even though some urban women could have more family and socio-economic resources to address these challenges.

8.5 Equal value: The interplay between the state and market

Chan and Bowpitt (2005: 28) recognise human beings as equal in terms of their 'intrinsic capacities', which support individuals' participation in society regardless of gender, class or race. In this dimension, in addition to the unequal value reinforced among different groups of women depending on their residency and age, women's lived experiences also reveal the unequal value of individuals, families and the state under an authoritarian political system and the influence of public patriarchy. These discussions expand the conceptualisation of (un)equal value regarding the public patriarchy that extends the unequal value between individuals, families, the market and the state as part of the broader social equality and justice issue. Equal value operationalised in this approach also locates women's experiences within multiple roles and identities across the family, community and in broader civil society beyond the equal value of paid work and care work.

To respond to globalisation and promote the modernisation agenda, the Chinese Communist Party has developed a hybrid strategy that accommodates two potentially contradictory norms and practices: economic liberalism and political authoritarianism (Liu, 2010). In the Chinese modernisation and marketisation process, the state has retreated from people's private lives regarding universal welfare provision. Limited welfare in terms of supporting reproduction has drawn a boundary, showing that care and family responsibilities in the private sphere belong to individuals and the family. However, this process does not necessarily decline the state's influence and intervention in other dimensions of people's everyday lives. Instead, the state defines what is important and prioritised for the Chinese to follow. Through family planning policies, distinguished levels of social security coverage and socialist campaigns, the state has intervened in individuals' and their family's fertility practices, active labour participation and harmonious family relations. Under this authoritarian approach, value is constructed in a top-down way. As a result, individuals are positioned in a less important position than the value of family and national development. Ji and Wu (2018) describe the gender ideology in contemporary China as 'hybrid, patriarchal, Confucian and neoliberal' (236). The national narrative of being a modern Chinese woman reflects the public patriarchy and top-down power exerted on women to prioritise the national economy and labour market participation. The state's narrow emphasis on women's value through active labour participation in the public sphere neglects women's equally important and valuable contributions to family life, reinforcing the unequal value between paid work and unpaid care work.

In addition to the intervention from the state, the competitive labour market also draws boundaries and ethics that are always gendered to categorise the ideal full-time worker as energetic and committed to their paid work (Williams et al., 1999). The gendered nature of work and the ideal worker culture limit people's choices and constrain people's capability to maintain paid and unpaid care work, making care providers—normally women—choose only one and compromise the other. According to most of the interviewees working in the labour market, the lack of equal treatment had caused them to prioritise the financial value of paid work instead of a long-term career—in this context, the production of conventional ideas of paid work is based on financial reasons. Some stay-at-home mothers find it difficult to justify their decision to re-enter the labour market with a lower salary than their partners and lose intimate relationships with their young children. The lower hourly pay for women and unpromising careers in part-time jobs makes women unconsciously accept that their paid work and labour market participation in the market is not as financially valuable as their male partners (see Chapter 6, section 6.3). From a monetary perspective, the unequal value of paid and unpaid care work measured by the market and the inequalities in the labour market reinforces the unequal value of paid work and unpaid care work via the couple income gaps. In modernising China, women find it hard to practise and safeguard the equal value between paid work and unpaid care work in a complex social situation where the state, the market and the remaining Confucian traditions interact. Chinese modernisation is state-led and profoundly shaped by a top-down approach different from other developed economies. However, similar to previous scholars' debates about valuing unpaid care work and women's rights to care (Lewis, 1997; Orloff, 1997; Lewis, 1998; Sainsbury, 1999; Lewis and Giullari, 2005; Saxonberg, 2013; Finch, 2021; Zagel and Lohmann, 2021), Chinese women have also gone through and continue going through this process as the women living in those developed economies with different modernisation processes.

Regarding women's equal right to work, age is closely related to their value in the labour market. Women of different ages have different work opportunities and different potential levels of gender income gaps (Cheung et al., 2011; Gu and Ji, 2019). China has a differentiated retirement age[35] for females (50 to 55) and male workers (60). Their experiences show the manifestation of market mechanisms on age discrimination and a preference for young labour. Intersecting the analytical layers of generations, this unequal value is practised through the work ethics of 'a bowl rice of the young' (*qingchun fan*, 青春饭), which mainly values young labour in the market and excludes older women from the formal labour market. As some interviewees indicate, they have to stay employed and work full-time after maternity leave because they fear it will be increasingly challenging to get formally employed as they get older.

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[35] In contemporary China, the official retirement age for men is 55 to 60 years, while for women it is 50 to 55 years.

This ageism is also revealed by the family coping strategy whereby older mothers (and in-laws) are recognised as a less economically valuable labour force and might retire early to support childcare for their daughters (in-laws). Women's experiences suggest that the unequal value between paid and unpaid care work occurs across gender and intergenerational relations, not only on an individual- or household-level - but also on an aggregative level across the different generations.

From a spatial perspective, older parents (in-laws) living in urban China are more likely to provide financial support. In comparison, older parents (in-laws) from rural China might more commonly support their adult daughters by sharing childcare (see Chapter 7, section 7.2). This scenario is affected by the lower social security coverage rate and a higher level of informal employment in rural China. With less financial and social security, rural women in the older generations are more willing to provide childcare and resign from informal job contracts with unstable working hours in exchange for family support from their adult children in the future. Drawn on different employment statuses, older mothers' value in labour market participation is assessed and compared, affecting the type of support they prefer to provide for their adult daughters with dependent children. The gendered division of labour and inequalities between women and men are shifted across different groups of women, from the older to the younger generations and from those in formal to informal employment. Rural women in the older generations are more likely to be in disadvantageous positions due to their age and informal employment status. These gender and intergenerational interactions create multiple inequalities and reflect the reinforced unequal value of paid and unpaid care work, formal and informal employment, urban and rural residency, and young and old labour force under the interplay of the market mechanism and a divisive welfare system in post-reform China.

Conclusion

Guided by the human dignity analytical framework, this research presents a panoramic overview of gender issues facing women across different dimensions. By engaging the key findings with contemporary research and debates, this chapter has enriched and broadened the empirical and theoretical understanding of wellbeing, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value among women with children living in contemporary China.

The discussion in this chapter has reflected the complexity and multidimensionality of the implications of the interaction between Chinese modernisation and transforming Confucianism in shaping women's everyday experiences. There are increasing opportunities and barriers for women to address their needs in fulfilling autonomy and mutuality across these interlinked dimensions developed in the human dignity approach. The ways and processes through which resources and opportunities are organised to fulfil women's autonomy and mutuality manifest varied forms of injustices and inequalities among different groups of women, depending on their residency, age, employment status and quality, and, importantly, access to family support. The next chapter will bring together the findings and discussions and draw out the key contributions of this study.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Introduction

The context of this study is the profound socio-economic transition that China has been undergoing since the 1980s and how this intersects with two particular and different elements of these transitions—namely, the ongoing modernisation process and transforming Confucianism. These changes have had significant social, economic and institutional impacts on Chinese society. This study has attempted to address two key issues: the relationship between Chinese modernisation and transforming Confucianism and its implications for the multi-dimensional lived experiences of women with children beyond their economic beings. By elaborating on the continuities and changes in the market, the state, welfare systems and family, this study has identified the social, institutional and economic dynamics that constantly re-configure women's varied life chances and challenges in fulfilling their autonomy and mutuality in everyday lives and practising gender justice.

This chapter maps the broad picture of this study and reflects on the implications for policymaking to support women's everyday experiences in contemporary China. Section 9.1 brings together the analysis and discussions in response to the research questions raised in this study. This section discusses four important contributions to the existing research and literature: developing and applying the human dignity approach, unfolding the conceptualisation of gender justice, transforming Confucianism and its implications, and portraying women's everyday experiences in Chinese modernisation. Section 9.2 elaborates on the implications for policymaking to support women's human dignity and promote a way of organising equal resources and opportunities as women fulfil their multiple roles and responsibilities. Finally, drawing from the whole research design and the findings and discussions in this study, the last section, Section 9.3, highlights the strengths and limitations of the study, as well as future research directions.

9.1 Key findings and contributions of this study

9.1.1 A multi-dimensional approach to researching and comparing women's experiences

Based on longitudinal national data, policy documents, and empirical data from interviews with policy stakeholders and women with children, this study reveals the multidimensionality and nuances of the social, economic and institutional transformation brought about by Chinese modernisation and its complex impact on women's everyday lives. This study contributes not only to the empirical evidence on rural and urban women's everyday experiences in the Chinese modernisation process but also to the development and application of the human dignity approach (Chan and Bowpitt, 2005; Chan et al., 2008) to inform future studies in local, national and international contexts. As the foundation of this study, the human dignity approach combines two philosophical positions that are taken to research and assess one's human dignity—autonomy in the Western philosophical tradition and mutuality in the Confucian tradition—as critical to human nature and needs. These two seemingly contradictory concepts, which are applied in this study, recognise human needs through both of these two philosophical perspectives instead of only focusing on one of them. The empirical data collected in the fieldwork showed that women need opportunities and socio-economic resources to maintain autonomy in the family, the workplace and broader society. Women also value the mutuality achieved when maintaining care relations and other interpersonal interactions beyond their family life. Integrating these two philosophical stances contributes to a more holistic way of researching and understanding the complexity and multidimensionality of women's everyday experiences, as the central concern of this study.

This approach also offers a coherent way of analysing women's lived experiences via five key dimensions: well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value, through which this approach is operationalised. With five key dimensions as a road map for organising and analysing the data, the findings elaborate on how different dimensions of human dignity coalesce and reconstruct women's different lives and changing roles and responsibilities in contemporary China. The application of this approach also underlines the unevenness and imbalance of these dimensions and how they interact with each other in people's everyday lives. This study brings the debate forward by developing intersecting and analytical layers—including gender and intergenerational interactions, spatial variations across rural and urban areas, and transforming Confucianism, in this approach, which paves the way for analysing individuals' lived experiences in different socio-economic contexts. The findings also suggest that the human dignity approach with a gender lens could join the gender-focused welfare debates and group societies concerning the fulfilment of women's autonomy and mutuality in addressing gender justice and the broader social justice issues in modernising China.

The important analytical layer developed in this approach, the rural-urban divide, illustrates that rural and urban women have different understandings in terms of how and when to use these family resources. This study has argued that focusing on a macro-level comparison across different countries or national levels cannot map out the varying dynamics of women's everyday experiences that are distinguished by internal variations. Identifying and comparing these variations and the similar and divergent consequences of Chinese socio-economic transitions is academically important, which expands the academic debates on regional commonalities and the divergence between villages and cities experiencing rapid transitions. The spatial analytical layer in the human dignity approach continues the conversation about the intersectionality between gender and locations in contemporary China and the heterogeneity of life chances to fulfil autonomy and mutuality across villages and cities. It also informs policy solutions that can be used to address different forms of institutionalised and structural inequalities and injustices more effectively and sustainably.

9.1.2 Conceptualising gender justice in Chinese modernisation

This study has provided substantive findings and analytical advances in understanding and conceptualising gender justice. Gender justice is not understood or conceptualised on its own. Instead, it is intersected with the transforming Confucianism in Chinese modernisation in various ways. The practices of gender justice are manifested through the tension between authoritarian governance, rapid marketisation, and socioeconomic development with disparities in Chinese modernisation. Informed by the multidimensionality of women's experiences, the source of gender injustices is not perceived from, or located in, a singular dimension in women's daily lives. This study shows that gender injustices and, as a result, gender inequalities derive from multiple and interrelated sources, including the existing Confucian traditions, state-led narratives and policy practices about women and families, the marketised economy in Chinese modernisation and the interaction of all of these sources.

From a macro- and national perspective, the state inadvertently imposes the narrative that ‘women are emancipated by the state’ and interprets gender justice from the top down. As discussed in Chapter 5, policy stakeholders texture gender justice into ‘relative justice’ and ‘numerical justice’ to highlight the 30% female political representation and full participation in the labour market, like their male counterparts, considering it exemplary ‘justice’ promoted by the state. This raises a broader risk of implicitly reiterating traditional gender norms limited to equality as how women could live like men and achieve what men have achieved. As the policy stakeholders suggested, the extension of maternity leave and breastfeeding leave targeting women aims to support women (with formal employment) to care for the family. At the same time, it inadvertently reinforces social and institutional discrimination against women by assuming and upholding women’s family responsibilities in terms of traditional gender norms. The term ‘gender’ in existing policy and legislation also often focuses on reaffirming women’s and men’s equal rights compared to male standards and achievement rather than explicitly addressing the current gender issues with more specific, sustainable and comprehensive actions. Even though this study has focused on women’s perspectives in their everyday experiences, understanding and conceptualising gender justice requires critical scrutiny in terms of not equivocating gender as women’s issues. The public patriarchy analysed in the findings illuminates the restrictions of the existing Chinese policy practices with gender-blind spots, which perpetuates gender injustices and reinforces the private patriarchy in family relations.

This study has also conceptualised gender justice as connecting to the larger question of social justice. The empirical evidence has highlighted the heterogeneity of women’s experiences that are shaped by structural and institutional inequalities that are built into Chinese society, depending on their locations (city or village), age and other divisions. Not all women from rural and urban China face similar challenges in organising unpaid care, paid work and other dimensions of their everyday lives. The interaction of gender and the household registration system positions women in a geo-economic hierarchy in which rural residents have more modest welfare provisions and fewer choices in terms of employment. Aligned with Walker and Milllar's (2020) argument, this study illustrates that women with fewer social and economic resources, in particular, rural and migrant women, find it more difficult to challenge the existing gendered order and gendered division of labour. Age also matters. Women's experiences broaden the understanding of the intersection between gender and age in shaping cross-generational gender injustices: care responsibilities are often shifted from young women to older women in the family. In addition, the segmentation between the public and private sector labour market reproduces the inequalities through different personal specifications, for example, education attainment and access to socio-economic networks. These multi-layered injustices position older women and women from disadvantaged backgrounds as more vulnerable with limited resources, making it more difficult for them not to perform traditional gender roles or organise paid work and care autonomously. The intersectionality of gender, places (rural and urban China), generations and other forms of social divisions suggest the repetition of structural inequalities and, as a result, wider gender and social injustice across different groups of women.

In the contemporary literature, gender justice has often been connected to the accountability of institutional arrangements, including the legal system, national legislation, policy and regulations. However, institutional arrangements, for example, regulating female representations in politics and the childcare leave only targeting women, do not always get translated into substantive gender justice, particularly in women's everyday lives. When responding to gender justice, there are disconnections between the state, family and individuals. As discussed previously, policy stakeholders in the government interpret 'justice' as a stated and simplified and singular outcome that is regulated and constructed by the state. Women's heterogeneous everyday lives while revealing different manifestations of practising gender justice. These mismatched expectations, understandings and constructions of the multiple versions of gender justice might explain the inefficiency and inadequacy of the existing law and policies and, therefore, why they are unable to support women's autonomy and mutuality in different dimensions of everyday lives as discussed in Chapter 8. The practices of gender justice and its impact on women's everyday experiences are located in the Chinese modernisation process featuring authoritarian politics and its impact on the market economy and social norms. It is possible, therefore, to argue in this study that the definition of gender justice not only refers to legislation and institutionalised arrangements in a top-down interpretation but is also coupled with plural meanings and embedded in a specific context drawing on lived experiences.

In sum, when conceptualising gender justice, this study addressed the plural meanings of gender justice. It located women's experiences against those of men and broader and multiple intersecting divisions among women across locations, generations and social-economic backgrounds in a larger context of social justice in Chinese modernisation. This study moves the debate forward and conceptualises gender justice as recognising that women's experiences are not a monolith but feature multiple and overlapping ways of organising resources and opportunities. For example, women's ways of accessing resources and opportunities are shaped by the interacting institutional, economic and social dynamics in Chinese modernisation, ranging from (but not limited to) the Chinese welfare reform, the household registration system, the public and private sector labour market segmentation, and the transformation of intergenerational resource transfers. Meanwhile, this process has highlighted that gender has a central place when allocating resources and opportunities within the family and beyond, i.e., in the state and the market. Drawing on the empirical evidence, the conceptualisation of gender justice in this study views the 'gendering' of social inequalities and injustices (Thiem, 2014) as a process that perpetuates the gendered institutions and, through women's perspective, navigates the strengths and weaknesses of the existing policy practices in challenging these inequalities and injustices.

9.1.3 Transforming Confucianism: Chinese familisation and beyond

As highlighted in Chapter 5, the Chinese demographic transitions reveal similar patterns to those of other modernised and developed societies, including decreasing fertility rates, delayed marriage, smaller family sizes and an ageing population. Chinese demographic and family transitions have 'phenomena-based' (Ochiai 2011:225) aspects that are similar to the second demographic transition in Europe. These changes in family structure and geographical distance between family generations have been recognised as the manifestation of Chinese modernisation, urbanisation, and population mobility since the Reform in the 1980s.

Some scholars, for example, Cheung and Kwan (2009) and Zhang (2017), have suggested that family intimacy and solidarity are fading away in contemporary China, particularly in the urban areas, because of economic affluence, urbanisation and population mobility. The decreasing marriage rate and increasing divorce rate suggest a shift away from stable kinship ties, at least structurally. Based on the macro data, the declining and lower fertility rate potentially reflects people's understandings and practices of individualism and the prioritisation of economic competition, which departs from Confucian values, highlighting the importance of kinship and family. However, as shown in Chapters 6 and 7, the prolonged dependence on family support identified in Japan (Izuhara and Forrest, 2013), South Korea (Chin et al., 2012; Lee, 2018a) and Taiwan (Kim, 2013) is also evident in contemporary China. Drawing on women's family practices, this study argues that although population mobility across regions has geographically separated nuclear and extended families and reduced the occurrence of intergenerational co-residence, the function of the family as the primary welfare provider has not experienced tremendous changes.

The increasing social risks and challenges of maintaining care relations have urged people to reconnect with family members across generations and support each other based on practicality. As women's experiences show, family resources are still central to most women's coping strategies in terms of organising unpaid care and unpaid work. Women's lived experiences are witnessing increasing family solidarity and emphasising the importance of intergenerational support, in sharing either childcare or financial resources, to maximise their household interests in the absence or sacristy of policy interventions. Responding to Forrest and Hirayama's (2009) discussions, neoliberal policies and marketisation have led to more dependence on family resources; this is a re-familisation process. This is also comprehensively discussed and argued by Izuhara (2010), who states that changes in living arrangements do not necessarily undermine family functions and relations.

While the ways in which people practise Confucian traditions and its implications on family interaction have changed as an active response to China's modernisation process. There are increasingly common practices of closer mother-daughter relations: the married daughter is no longer 'spilt water' from the natal family. With the diminishing practice of patrilocal residence, there has been a departure from the unilateral resource transfer from men's older parents, which was part of the Confucian tradition, to more flexible and diverse family coping strategies involving women's parents, especially among the one-child generation. These transitions have challenged the traditions set by patrilocal residence and patrilineal organisation, meaning that intergenerational support and resource transfer are not limited to occurring only between parents and their adult sons. Increasingly equal resource distribution between sons and daughters has also been reflected in the emergence of dual patrilineal and matrilineal family residences, in line with previous research (Murphy et al., 2011).

A wide range of research has shown comprehensive empirical evidence and illustrated the impact of the market reforms and housing privatisation that have benefited specific cohorts to accumulate wealth and access economic opportunities (Meng, 2004; Meng, 2007; Forrest and Izuhara, 2009; Mei and Liu, 2014; Cai and Cheng, 2015; Yan, 2018; Abruquah et al., 2019; Zhang, 2022). This process has particularly favoured elite households in urban China and those in the public sector (Walder and He, 2014). Aligned with previous research, women's experiences in this study show that, more often in urban China, the direction of support across generations is from older parents (aged between 50-70) who have more financial resources, e.g., stable pensions and profits from housing privatisation, to their adult children (aged between 20-40). Yan (2010) previously argued that the younger generation have been trying to establish their nuclear families and escape from the power of the older generation. However, the women researched in this study revealed a different story: financial resources owned by the older generations do not always reinforce age seniority and hierarchy in intergenerational interactions. Instead, their parents were willing to financially, physically and emotionally support their adult children, including purchasing a house, providing childcare services and other forms. These resource transfers to adult children is perceived as a family strategy to maximise the household interests and demonstrate family solidarity. Although this process is more prevalent in urban China, it demonstrates a prominent cultural shift from traditional Confucianism to modernisation and reflects the diminishing patriarchy in terms of age seniority that was part of the Confucian tradition. These changes have also mapped out the democratisation of Chinese families with modernising intergenerational interactions.

The transformations in gender and intergenerational interactions among Chinese families show the tension between the modernisation process and the shifting definition of family and the unchanged family function as a primary welfare provider for family members. In addition, these transformations do not always lead to a structural and cultural shift to gender 'equalisation', as (Giddens, 1993) argued. Women's experiences have suggested that care and housework are still shared within the family and among different groups of women, from young women with children to older women with grandchildren. This process also features 'familism by default' (Saraceno, 2016), where the state assumes that the family is a welfare provider and provides limited support and underdeveloped market services. The state strategically and selectively emphasises the Confucian traditions of filial piety and family obligations to justify its modest welfare provisions to support families. As a result, there is an incompatibility between the family's assumed role as a welfare provider and the existing social policies that cannot support individuals' care and financial needs in the Chinese modernisation process. Informed by women's multidimensional lived experiences, this incompatibility is manifested through limiting coping strategies in their everyday lives, such as precarious distant care relationships and compromised autonomy in terms of intergenerational co-residency.

Whilst transforming Confucianism not only manifests through the shifts in gender and intergenerational interactions in the family but is also embedded in the state's top-down vision and policy practices. The state remains pervasive when shaping Confucianism through state-led social campaigns and the re-interpretation of Confucian traditions in shaping social and cultural norms. Under authoritarian governance, Confucianism has been used to emphasise the family unit's stability and connect the personal responsibility for supporting a harmonious family and practising social virtues as national commitments. At the individual level and in women's nuanced everyday lives, how they should interact with family members and perceive their personal development is still, to a different extent, influenced by Confucian traditions and Confucianism, selectively transformed by the state. A gendered imagery of a 'harmonious family' co-exists with women's empowerment and autonomy in post-reform China.

Specifically, the research participants' expectations of having a solid economic foundation and loving heterosexual family relations were often shaped by these state-led social campaigns, which define what a 'modern' Chinese family should look like and inspire individuals to embrace this state-led vision. Therefore, when conceptualising transforming Confucianism, this study highlights the relationship between Confucian traditions, authoritarian governance and personal success, encompassing broader social, economic and political perspectives on Chinese modernisation. With empirical and analytical significance, this study contributes to the multi-dimensional and multi-scalar understandings of transforming Confucianism that manifests through complex lived experiences with the democratisation of gender and intergenerational relationships, top-down national narratives and policy practices across the individual, family and broader societal levels.

9.1.4 The uneasy co-existence of traditions and modernity: Portraying women's everyday lives

As many scholars researching Chinese modernisation argue, there are changes from traditional to modern, public to private, and collective to individual. The findings in this study further suggest that these changes do not always have a clear boundary, nor are they unidirectional. The implications of these multidimensional changes also reveal varied ways and processes of shaping the practices of gender justice and women's everyday experiences. For example, there is the socialist aftermath accompanied by state-led institutionalised gender equality, smaller family sizes but closer family relations and interactions, and modern perception of gender roles. The general population born after the 1980s have experienced the strict implementation of family planning policies, particularly in urban China, and benefitted from the rapid economic development and increasing opportunities over the last four decades. The mothers (aged 22-40) who participated in this study are the group who faced these far-reaching and complex socio-economic consequences of these policies and the Reform since the 1980s. Changes in women's socio-economic status, such as increasing educational attainment and political leadership (see Chapter 5), are often perceived as a 'progression' of the Chinese modernisation process. However, these higher education investments and economic and political opportunities did not always enable them to receive equal treatment and results to their male counterparts, particularly in a competitive labour market. This study has a central argument about the complexity of women's everyday experiences in Chinese modernisation: a hybrid of progress and return in different dimensions.

In a previous study, Sun and Chen (2015) argued that the combination of existing patriarchal traditions and the modernisation process had worsened gender inequality because the state largely retreated from providing public care services, laundry and dining halls after the Reform in 1978 (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1). However, this study has shown a more complicated and nuanced picture. This study suggests that the interaction between the socialist reconstruction of gender roles, emerging Confucian traditions, and modernisation does not always worsen gender justice across all dimensions. On the contrary, some parts of the 'socialist heritage', such as the labour market in the public sector with its strict implementation of the Labour Protection Regulation for Female Employees (State Council of China, 2012), continue to play an important role in resisting the gender inequality brought by the marketisation process. As policy implementors and employers, the government and most work units simultaneously show powerful and effective governance in practising maternity welfare and childcare policies, continually maintaining more protection for women working in the public sector. Despite the neglect of the value of unpaid care and family responsibilities, the reconstruction of gender and gender roles in the policy narratives has established women's modern role in the public sphere via active labour market participation.

Regarding family life, this study shows concrete evidence of the co-existence of rapid family nuclearisation in terms of structure and a remaining and ever-increasing demand for family solidarity in contemporary China. The state has emphasised family obligations politically and morally. Therefore, individualising living arrangements and shrinking family size does not always weaken the family solidary, whether in sharing practical or financial resources. As discussed in Chapter 7, this is reflected as a paradox in women's family life to maintain a dual-breadwinner household, which encompasses the expectation of re-claiming the autonomy as an independent household and dependence on older parents (in-laws) to share care and financial pressures. In the previous study, these phenomena were conceptualised as 'familistic individualisation' (Ochiai and Hosoya, 2014). Meanwhile, the state's pervasive intervention in broader individual-family-state relationships in an authoritarian political context manifests another paradox. Women face rising contradictions between modern identity in claiming self-determination for personal development, state-led construction of family responsibilities and being patriotic citizens devoted to national development.

The extent to which modernised gender ideology has been practised and moved forward in women's everyday lives has also become more complex and dyanmic. Women's experiences suggest that although women have changed their attitudes in a more gender-egalitarian direction, the gendered division of labour practised in daily life has not been eliminated and even reinforced due to the limited resources and support available to them. These research findings align well with previous studies. Such scholars as Thompson (2014) argue that the gender roles practised are not necessarily consistent with people's modernised understandings of gender equality and the equal value between paid and unpaid care work. There are different forms of uneasy co-existence of traditions and modernity in these women's lived experiences that feature old and new, independent and dependent, and individual and national.

9.2 Implications for policy and practices

Over the last several decades, Chinese modernisation has shown that socio-economic development and increasingly equal opportunities for women and men do not necessarily bring equal outcomes. The existing institutional, political and economic dynamics could potentially reinforce and reproduce gender injustices in different dimensions. This study demonstrates that it is not a normative form of modernisation to have all unfolding modern values, gender and social justice in place, particularly in a society experiencing rapid socio-economic transitions. Informed by the human dignity approach, this thesis has revealed the gap between the state's welfare measures and women's needs to organise their caring and working lives autonomously, which is insightful to inform policy suggestions to fulfil women's autonomy and mutuality as a long-term goal.

9.2.1 A dualistic approach: Promoting rights to work and to care

Women's experiences in the labour market have shown that the focus on how to promote the female labour market participation rate is far more than enough to promote gender justice in the long term. To move the debate forwards, practices of gender justice should not be confined to motivating and supporting women to participate in the labour market but should also ensure quality employment and recognition of the value and needs of unpaid care work in the labour market. If unpaid care and men's rights to care are not valued in the market, there will still be a greater return to the gendered division of labour.

As women's experiences show, relying on the family as the primary welfare provider has also been more challenging. It is important to develop a more sustainable care system that recognises both women's and men's rights to care and work. The diversity of household types and living arrangements requires more institutional and policy changes to address and respond to these demographic transitions and the shifting lifestyles in contemporary China. It is crucial to support multiple services and resources outside the family and break the rigid boundary between the private and public spheres in supporting childcare and parenting.

In contemporary China, women have more diverse expectations of work–life balance and varied needs to maintain this balance. The mainstream discussion of empowering women to take on paid work—for instance, 'women can hold up half the sky' and 'her power'—does not recognise women's diverse and changing needs in maintaining the care relations and career development they prefer. Policymakers need to engage in conversations and adopt a dualistic approach to valuing care relations that involves a supportive and sustainable care system and labour market, which aims to value women's rights to care and work with more choices and resources.

9.2.2 Enhancing social inclusion and equal value

Drawing on women's lived experiences, this study has argued for the equal value of different groups of women and the importance of care relations and labour market participation to address the challenges faced by women in both family and workplace contexts. The Chinese social and economic transformation has made significant improvements to people's quality of life. However, alongside the economic successes of the economic reform, the Chinese government has also constructed a 'divisive and discriminatory' (Chan et al. 2008: 195) welfare system across rural and urban China and the public and private sectors, as well as among those in the formal and informal labour markets, privileging urban- and formal employees. To promote equal value, it is important to recognise these institutionalised and structural inequalities and barriers among different groups of women and to identify solutions by which they might be addressed.

Income contributory-based social security excludes those without formal employment from receiving basic social protection. Those women with limited economic resources can rely only on family, usually their male partners. If the equal value of paid and unpaid care work is not recognised, women who experience unequal treatment in the workplace may be further disadvantaged after opting out of the labour market. Those who prefer to maintain care relations full-time can also risk losing financial autonomy and basic social security. More diverse and inclusive social norms and policy practices are required to accommodate people's more pluralistic needs and lifestyles instead of expecting a unified life course for all individuals with family support and formal employment in the market.

9.2.3 Recognising women's changing and varied needs

Informed by the human dignity approach, this study has embraced a more complex and multi-dimensional understanding of women's everyday lives with a gender, spatial and temporal perspective. The care support from the older generations becomes far more important to enable younger women to continue their paid work in their 30s when they have young dependent children. The older mothers (in-laws) have to compromise and retire early to take over these care responsibilities in the family, supporting the women to work in the labour market. Policymakers need to recognise the interactions of both gender and intergenerational relations in families and be gender-sensitive in terms of how the unintended consequences can be brought on women in different age cohorts or in different life stages. Women in different age cohorts and life stages can constantly face different dilemmas in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

In contemporary China, there have been limited responses at the institutional level to address the emerging social issues and uncertainties, resulting in more challenges for women to satisfy their needs in fulfilling their autonomy and mutuality across different dimensions. Given regional disparities and inequalities, the government needs to reconsider their strategies for balancing economic growth and social development and cohesively improving social welfare provision for rural and urban residents. Therefore, enhancing human dignity with a coherent and consistent policy objective is essential to promote gender justice. Rather than relying on market forces and heavily on family resources, the state should actively provide and maintain access to well-being support, care relations, social integration, self-determination, and practising equal value in different forms with sufficient resources and well-designed choices.

9.3 Strengths, limitations and future research directions

These findings have highlighted the implications of the interaction between the modernisation process and transforming Confucianism on women's everyday experiences. This thesis has contributed to developing and applying a new way of researching women that provides substantive findings and analytical advancements in understanding and conceptualising gender justice, transforming Confucianism and Chinese modernisation. This study deepens the understanding of the reproduced gendered practices across different groups of women, including full-time, part-time and non-working mothers, mothers from single and partnered households and generally rural and urban mothers. It has also offered a multi-dimensional and multi-scalar exploration of women's well-being, care relations, social integration, self-determination and equal value. The knowledge of relations between the Chinese modernisation process and transforming Confucianism and its implications for women's everyday experiences has been established by drawing on secondary data, national datasets and policy documents, and, more importantly, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and individual informants. The in-depth semi-structured interview data collected from two representative case study locations in a city and a village in Guangdong province have contributed to the contextualised understandings and stories of women's lived experiences. Using rural and urban China as a case study also enhances the understanding of the variations and convergence of the modernisation process within China, which ensures different stories are not neglected in contemporary social policy research. It contributes to studying East Asian welfare regimes and comparative social policy in a broader global context.

By portraying women’s lived experiences with their challenges and opportunities, this study enriches the understanding of the complexity and contradictions of the implications brought by a state-led modernisation process for women’s family, work and social life. The focus on care arrangement reveals women’s vital coping strategies to share their childcare, disproportionately rely on family and resist outsourcing childcare in the market. It also maps out mothers’ adherence and opposition to the gendered roles in unpaid, paid work and career development constrained by time and financial resources. Through their working experiences in the labour market, this study broadens the understanding of mothers’ struggles and solutions to the intact gender discrimination present in the workplace. Women’s working experiences reveal how mothers negotiate their motherhood role to mitigate the motherhood penalty and challenge the gendered order in the public sphere. By investigating their household decision making and couple finance, this study enriches the understanding of women’s changing and fluid self-determination with great progression and different levels of autonomy. Drawing on women’s parenting experiences, this study reflects the remaining gendered and classed experiences for women to fulfil the constructed ‘good mother roles’ under the interplay of the state and market. By carefully comparing the experiences of different groups of women with children, it elaborates on the inequalities of time, financial resources, and life chances of rural and urban women and the rich and the poor.

Despite its strengths, this study also has certain limitations. Due to limited time and resources, research on two case study locations in southern China can not reflect or represent the lived experiences of every mother living in Chinese society. Women’s needs, opportunities and challenges change over time and should be seen as part of a multi-dimensional nexus across the life course. In addition to the temporal perspective applied in this study, longitudinal research with a generational perspective will be insightful to capture the continuities and changes in how women respond to challenges and opportunities over time. These changes also vary among different groups of women. For example, there is more fluidity among migrant women moving across different locations. In the fieldwork, migrant women often shared their struggles to stay in urban China and expressed an intention to return to their villages because migrating had separated them from their young children in their hometowns. Therefore, future research can draw on longitudinal data to capture the continuities and changes in women's different life stages and life transitions, such as changes in employment status, childbirth (with more than one child) and movement across locations.

With a focus on women's multiple roles and responsibilities, this study researched women with at least one child. The impacts of the modernisation process on women without children are not researched in this study. Researching women without children can enrich the discussion about the different implications of the Chinese modernisation process on women with fewer family roles and care responsibilities and potentially varied experiences in the labour market. With the shifting population strategy and the implementation of the three-child policy in 2021, there are more questions about how this will affect women without children, particularly working mothers who are more sensitive to these fertility-related policies owing to ongoing gender discrimination against mothers. Studying and comparing these women without children can enhance the understanding of women's self-determination to respond to the shifting social, economic and institutional dynamics when they have different roles, with or without childcare responsibilities.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the past decade has seen rapid changes in the dynamics of population mobility. This study has adopted household registration status as the key identification of rural or urban residents. However, rural and urban China does not present only geographical and regional dynamics to compare women's heterogeneous everyday experiences. In the context of the persistent regional disparities, even within the same province, there are significant socio-economic variations among cities, for instance, first-tier cities such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen and less developed third-tier cities such as Jieyang and Heyuan. Therefore, these multi-scalar regional dynamics and nuanced geo-economic transitions are vital to comprehensively revealing the Chinese modernisation process and its complex implications for individuals. Future studies can pay more attention to the interactions between regions and other forms of geographical dynamics that are not limited to the rural–urban divide.

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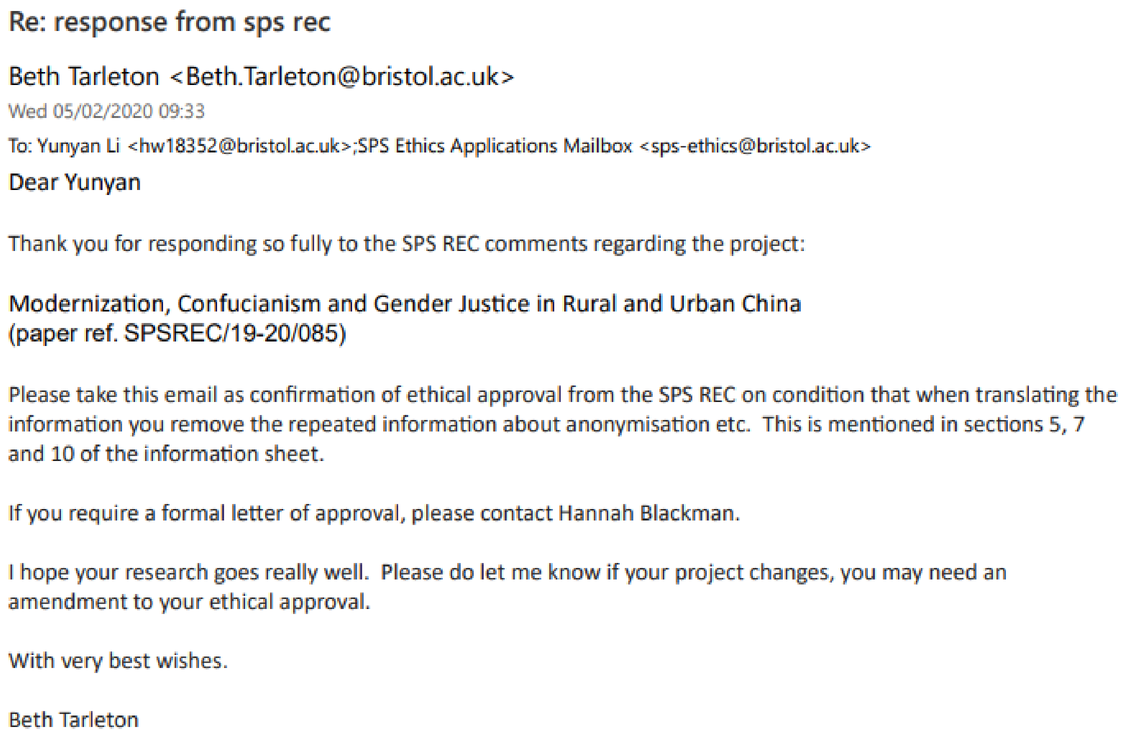
Appendix 1: Ethical Approval Letters x2 (in person and online)



Re: response from sps rec

Beth Tarleton <Beth.Tarleton@bristol.ac.uk>
Wed 05/02/2020 09:33
To: Yunyan Li <hw18352@bristol.ac.uk>;SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox <sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk>

Dear Yunyan

Thank you for responding so fully to the SPS REC comments regarding the project:

Modernization, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China
(paper ref. SPSREC/19-20/085)

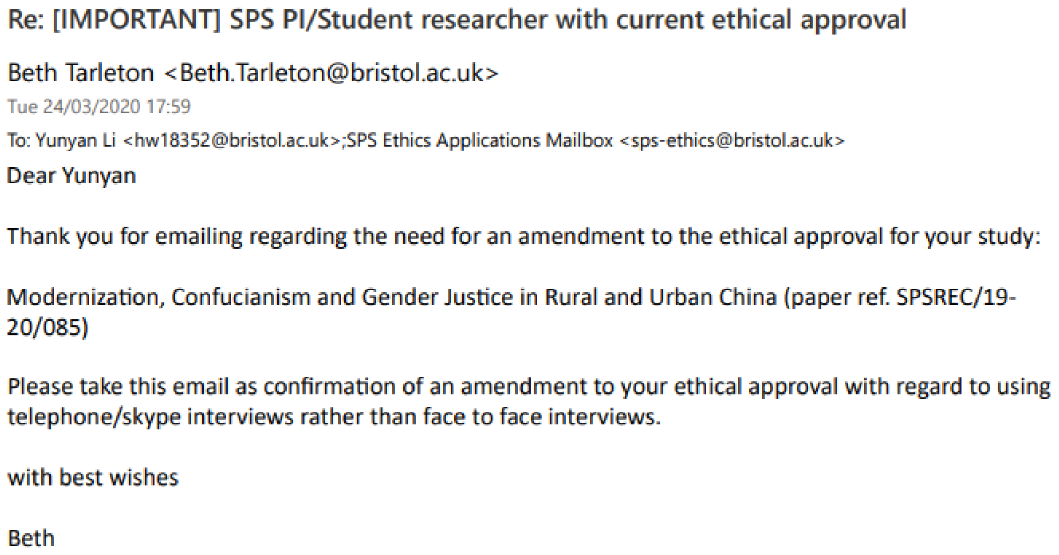
Please take this email as confirmation of ethical approval from the SPS REC on condition that when translating the information you remove the repeated information about anonymisation etc. This is mentioned in sections 5, 7 and 10 of the information sheet.

If you require a formal letter of approval, please contact Hannah Blackman.

I hope your research goes really well. Please do let me know if your project changes, you may need an amendment to your ethical approval.

With very best wishes.

Beth Tarleton



Re: [IMPORTANT] SPS PI/Student researcher with current ethical approval

Beth Tarleton <Beth.Tarleton@bristol.ac.uk>
Tue 24/03/2020 17:59
To: Yunyan Li <hw18352@bristol.ac.uk>;SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox <sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk>

Dear Yunyan

Thank you for emailing regarding the need for an amendment to the ethical approval for your study:

Modernization, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China (paper ref. SPSREC/19-20/085)

Please take this email as confirmation of an amendment to your ethical approval with regard to using telephone/skype interviews rather than face to face interviews.

with best wishes

Beth

Appendix 2: Topic Guide for Individual Informants

1. *Introduction and consent form*

-Introduce myself
-Remind the participants about the research topics
-Explain the use of data and data storage procedures clearly
-If they agree, invite the participant to sign the consent form once they are willing to join
-Get permission to tape the interview

2. *About you*

In the beginning, I will ask some formal questions that will help me to know more about you.

After this, we will go on chatting about your daily life.

-If you agree, I will ask you for the following personal information:

(1) Age
(2) Marital status
(3) Household registration (*Hukou* system residence)
(4) Number of children and their age
(5) Working status and occupation (stay-at-home mum; full-time employment; part-time employment)
(6) Number of people in household and living arrangement
(7) How long have you lived in this location?

3. *About your daily activities and care relations*

-How does your day start?
-Do your daily activities vary across the week?
-How do you feel about your daily activities/routine?
-You have mentioned different activities, how does care responsibilities fit into these daily routines?
-Do you share these responsibilities with anyone? (for example, other family members, friends, community, private services, and state care services)
-How do you feel about the level of care responsibilities you have?
-Is there anything you would like to change?

4. *About your work*

-Could you please tell me about your employment history and trajectory?
-What has affected your decision to work/not work in the paid work?
-What does your partner/family think of your working choices (for example, occupations, employment status, work patterns at home, the labour market and the community)?

-How have their ideas and attitudes affected your decisions to engage/ not participate in the paid work?
- (For women who have work outside the home) How do you manage the balance between the work outside the home and the family responsibilities?
-How does your work(place) respond to your family responsibilities (like childcare, elderly care)?
-Do you think your gender makes any difference in the way you are treated at work or the jobs you are asked to do? Do you have any examples of this?
-Do you want something different or something to be changed?

5. *Autonomy and self-determination*

-Who is managing the household finances?
-Who contributes the household finances and how?
-And what about decision making at home – how does that work in your household?
-Are you responsible for any decision making? And what are these?
-How do you feel about that?
-Do you want something different or something to be changed?

6. *About your relationships with family, friends and work colleagues (if appropriate)*

-Since having care responsibilities, what has been changed in your interpersonal relationships and the interaction in daily life with your

(1) family
(2) friends
(3) colleagues in the paid work (if appropriate)?

-What kinds of support have you received in managing work-life balance and participating in social and cultural life from your

(1) family
(2) friends
(3) colleagues in the formal labour market (if appropriate)?
(4) Local and national government services

-How do you feel about these changes (if there are any)?
-How do you feel about the support that you received (if there is any)?
-What do you want to change or to be different?

7. *Your feeling and well-being*

-How do you perceive yourself as a woman with children?
-Have you ever experienced any difficulties in the family and the workplace? What about stress or anxiety?

-What kinds of mental and physical health support you have received from the family and the workplace (if appropriate)?
-What kinds of well-being support you have received in the current policies?
-How do you think of these well-being supports?
-Do you want something different or something to be changed?

The end
-The research will give an overview of the interview and ask you whether they have any more to add or any questions.

Appendix 3: Topic Guide for Stakeholders

1. *Self-Introduction and the Consent Form*

-Introduce myself
-Restate the use of data and storage procedures
-If the participant agrees, invite the participants to sign the consent form once they are willing to join
-Get permission for taping the interview

2. *About you and your current work*

- If you agree, can I ask for some basic information about you?
  (1) Officer Title
  (2) Department
  (3) Policy areas

-Could you tell me about your role and main responsibilities?
-How long have you worked for this organisation, and what is your role?
-What are the main family/women policies you are responsible for now?
-What projects/ experiences have you had and managed in this job?

3. *About your workplace*

-What does your organisation provide for women's welfare?

-How have women's issues been discussed in your workplace and your project?
-What are the main issues you discussed and why?
-How do these policies liaise and cooperate with other institutions/departments/ministries?
-What are the challenges in making and implementing this policy, and why?
How did you address these challenges, and what can we do to improve them?

4. *Perception of gender justice*

-Could you please share your understanding of 'gender justice'?
-Do you think is it important to practise gender justice in contemporary China? If so, why?
-How do you feel about some of the big issues in gender justice: For example, the gender pay gap, women's access to social security services, the 'motherhood penalty' and childcare services?

5. *Policymaking, implementation and suggestions*

-What are the challenges in practising gender justice in contemporary China?
-What policies have worked effectively to promote gender justice so far?

-In your opinion, what are the influences of implementing these policies on women, their families, and society? For example, these policies include ‘same job, equal pay, ‘maternity scheme’, ‘childcare service reform’, ‘reproduction health scheme’.
-Could you please share some suggestions about how current policies can maximise their effects on better helping women?

End of the interview
-The researcher will give an overview of the interview.
-Ask the participants whether they have any more to add or any questions.
-Nicely ask some informal and friendly communication, e.g. what will you do later

Appendix 4: Policy Documents List

Definition: Policy Documents/Legislation/Annual Reports/White Paper
Published Year: 1990 to 2020

Institutions	Published Year	Document Name
Ministry of Labour and Social Security	1994	Maternity insurance for enterprise employees Trail
The State Council	2001	Outline of the Chinese Women's Development Program and Children's Development (2001-2011)
The State Council	2006	Chinese women Development and China Children's Development Key Indicators
The State Council	2011	Outline of the Chinese Women's Development Program and Children's Development (2011-2020)
The State Council	2015	China Gender Equality and Women's Development White Paper
The State Council	2015	Outline of the Chinese Women's Development Program and Children's Development (2011-2020) 2013 Monitoring Report
The State Council	2016	Outline of the Chinese Women's Development Program and Children's Development (2011-2020) Follow-up 2016 Monitoring Report
The State Council	2016	Notice of the National Population Development Regulations (2016-2030)
The State Council	2017	Outline of the Chinese Women's Development Program and Children's Development (2011-2020) Midterm Monitoring Report
The State Council	2018	Outline of the Chinese Women's Development Program and Children's Development (2011-2020) Follow-up 2017 Monitoring Report
The State Council	2019	Guiding Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Promoting the Development of Infant and Child Care Services Under 3 Years Old
The State Council & Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security	2019	Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Comprehensively Promoting the Implementation of the Combination of Maternity Insurance and Basic Medical Insurance for Staff and Workers
The State Council	2019	Opinions on adjusting and perfecting the birth policy

Appendix 5: Stakeholder Participant Information Sheet

Title of the research: **Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China**

This document will give you general information about the research and explain what this research involves.

1. **Who is conducting this research?**

The researcher, Yunyan Li, is a PhD student in the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. This study is part of the doctoral thesis under the supervision of Professor Patricia Kennett, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol.

2. **What are the objectives of this study?**

This is a piece of research looking at women's everyday experiences and the variations among different groups of women with at least one child in rural and urban areas. It also investigates how the continuity and changes in women's experiences and work-life balance are taking place in contemporary China. The results will be formulated as a PhD thesis summited to the University of Bristol. Specific chapters will be published as journal articles, book chapters or academic reports.

3. **Why have I been invited to take part?**

The research is voluntary. You have been invited because you have worked in the field of women's welfare and are involved in the policy process that can affect women's lives in the family and the workplace.

4. **What would happen if you participated in this study?**

If you decide to participate in this research,

1) Your participation is voluntary.
2) Before the interview, you will receive a participation information sheet and the topic guide through email or post in advance. And then, you can decide whether you want to participate in this research.
3) Before starting the interview, if you agree, you will be asked to sign a consent form.
4) After getting your consent, the one-to-one interview will last for around 60 minutes. The whole interview will be confidential and anonymous. The researcher will ensure the interview is kept only between you and the researcher.
5) The interview location will be discussed based on your preferences and availability.

6) If you agree, the interview will be taped and kept confidentially in a university encrypted digital voice recorder. The digital record will be only used for research purposes.
7) Interviews will include 8 to 10 open-ended questions. With your permission, you would answer these questions in Chinese based on your personal experiences. There is no right or wrong answer. Also, you are free to refuse to answer any questions or pause the interview at any time.
8) With your permission, your opinions and experienced might be quoted in the PhD thesis. In this case, all your features and identity will be hidden and recoded to ensure anonymity.

5. What can be the risks of involving in this interview, and how will you address it?

Since work positions and organisations in women's welfare are specific, there will be some possible risks of being recognised. To avoid being recognisable, the name of all interviewees will be replaced by the new codes irrelevant to any features of them. Other recognisable employment history and events will be recorded and deleted. Other identifiable information, including occupation and ages, will be stored securely. However, this interview will use your precious time to share your experiences. Meanwhile, there is no pressure on you to participate in this research.

To ensure confidentiality, all data will only be accessed by the researcher. The data, including the interview notes, digital records, and transcripts, will be only used for research purposes. If you agree, direct quotes will only be used in the research output, including the PhD thesis, article and conference presentation, and these quotes will be anonymised if you agree. All data will be securely stored in a password-protected university server or a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol. This study has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol.

6. What are the benefits of participating in this study?

Your contribution to the research greatly helps the academic knowledge development, policymakers, NGOs and you, in the future, to better understand a Chinese woman's experiences. Therefore, more reasonable and considerate policies can be made in the future.

7. What will happen to the information you provide?

1) All data will be securely stored in a password-protected university server or a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol. Only the researcher will have access to these data.
2) If you agree, your ideas and experiences quoted will be only used for academic purposes in the PhD thesis, journal articles, and presentations. All quotes will be anonymised with your consent.
3) These data will not be shared by other researchers or re-used.

8. **How will the data be stored and managed in the future?**

In order to comply with the data storage policy in the University of Bristol, all data will be stored for 20 years in a password-protected university server or in a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol. And then the data will be destroyed.

9. **What is the limitation of confidentiality, and how will the researcher minimise it?**

There is a limitation of confidentiality in this study. Firstly, there will be some risks of being recognised. Since work positions and organisations in women's welfare are specific, there will be some possible risks of being recognised. Secondly, confidentiality might not be able to comply if there is a risk of harm. When some illegal activities and cases that might hurt participants or others are found, confidentiality might not be followed. This information will be discussed with the researcher's supervisors to decide whether confidentiality should be broken, and the researcher should report these activities to related institutions once it is necessary. All research procedures will fully follow the research procedure and ethical regulations of the University of Bristol.

10. **What if you want to drop out of this study?**

You can decide to participate or not after reading this participation information sheet. This research is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without giving any reasons. If you change your mind and decide that you do not wish to participate after an interview has taken place, you can request that all audio recordings and transcripts be deleted at any time. However, I may not be able to comply with this request if the data has been anonymised.

Ethical Review

This study has been approved by the University of Bristol's School for Policy Studies Ethics Committee.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study and the interview, want to drop out from this project or need any further information, please contact the research by email (hw18352@bristol.ac.uk).

Complaints regarding this research:

If you have further questions or any complaints regarding this research or the researcher, you can also contact the researcher's supervisor, Professor Patricia Kennett.

Patricia Kennett, PhD
Professor of International and Comparative Policy Studies
Director of Education
University of Bristol, UK
(p.kennett@bristol.ac.uk)
School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol
8 Priory Road, Bristol, BS8 1TZ UK
Tel: 00 44 (0)117 9545583

All interviews will follow the regulations and ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality.

Appendix 6: Individual Informant Participation Information Sheet

Title of the research: **Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China**

This document will give you general information about the research and explain what this research involves.

1. **Who is conducting this research?**

The researcher, Yunyan Li, is a PhD student in the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. This study is part of the doctoral thesis under the supervision of Professor Patricia Kennett, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol.

2. **What are the objectives of this study?**

This is a piece of research looking at women's everyday experiences and the variations among different groups of women with children or children in rural and urban areas. It also investigates how the continuity and changes in women's experiences and work-life balance are taking place in contemporary China. The results will be formulated as a PhD thesis summited to the University of Bristol. Specific chapters will be published as journal articles, book chapters or academic reports.

3. **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You have been invited because you have experience in having a child or children and managing family life and other social life. You are very familiar with how to manage your everyday life as a woman with a child or children, what support you get, and the challenges you might face. The research is voluntary.

4. **What would happen if you participated in this study?**

If you decide to participate in this research,

1) Your participation is voluntary.
2) Before the interview, you will receive a participation information sheet and the topic guide through email or post in advance. And then, you can decide whether you want to participate in this research.
3) Before starting the interview, if you agree, you will be asked to sign a consent form.
4) After getting your consent, the one-to-one interview will last for around 60 minutes. The whole interview will be confidential and anonymous. The researcher will ensure the interview is kept only between you and the researcher.
5) The interview location will be discussed based on your preferences and availability.

6) If you agree, the interview will be taped and kept confidentially in a university-owned encrypted digital voice recorder. The digital record will be only used for research purposes.
7) Interviews will include 8 to 10 open-ended questions. With your permission, you would answer these questions in Chinese based on your personal experiences. There is no right or wrong answer. Also, you are free to refuse to answer any questions or pause the interview at any time.
8) With your permission, your opinions and experienced might be quoted in the PhD thesis. In this case, all your features and identity will be hidden and recoded to ensure anonymity.

5. What can be the risks of involving in this interview

There will be no physical, medical or psychological risks in this interview. This study has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. However, this interview will use your precious time to share your experiences. Meanwhile, there is no pressure on you to participate in this research.

6. What are the benefits of participating in this study?

Your contribution to the research greatly helps the academic knowledge development, policymakers, NGOs and you, in the future, to better understand a Chinese woman's experiences. Therefore, more reasonable and considerate policies can be made in the future.

7. What will happen to the information you provide?

1) All data will be securely stored in a password-protected university server or a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol. Only the researcher will have access to these data.
2) If you agree, your ideas and experiences quoted will be only used for academic purposes in the PhD thesis, journal articles, and presentations. All quotes will be anonymised with your consent.
3) These data will not be shared by other researchers or re-used.

8. How will the data be stored and managed in the future?

To comply with the data storage policy in the University of Bristol, all data will be stored for 20 years in a password-protected university server or a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol. And then the data will be destroyed.

9. How will the interview be confidential and anonymous?

To avoid any identification of specific people and locations, the name of all interviewees will be replaced by the new codes irrelevant to any features of them. Other identifiable information, including occupation and ages, will be stored securely. To ensure confidentiality, all data will only be accessed by the researcher. The data, including the interview notes, digital records, and transcripts, will be only used for research purposes. If you agree, direct quotes will only be used in the research output, including the Ph.D. thesis, article and conference presentation, and these quotes will be anonymised with your consent. All data will be securely stored in a password-protected university server or a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol.

10. What is the limitation of confidentiality, and how will the researcher minimise it?

The data will be confidential unless there is a risk of harm. There is a limitation of confidentiality in this study. The confidentiality might not be able to comply when some illegal activities and cases that might hurt participants or others are found. This information will be discussed with the researcher’s supervisors to decide whether confidentiality should be broken, and the researcher should report these activities to related institutions once it is necessary. All research procedures will fully follow the research procedure and ethical regulations of the University of Bristol.

11. What if you want to drop out of this study?

You can decide to participate or not after reading this participation information sheet. This research is voluntary. If you decide to take part, you are still free to stop at any time without giving any reasons. If you change your mind and decide that you do not wish to participate after an interview has taken place, you can request that all audio recordings and transcripts be deleted at any time. However, I may not be able to comply with this request if the data has been anonymised.

Ethical Review

This study has been approved by the University of Bristol’s School for Policy Studies Ethics Committee.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study and the interview, want to drop out from this project or any further information, please contact the research by email (hw18352@bristol.ac.uk).

Complaints regarding this research:

If you have further questions or any complaints regarding this research or the researcher, you can also contact the researcher’s supervisor, Professor Patricia Kennett.

Patricia Kennett, PhD
Professor of International and Comparative Policy Studies
Director of Education
University of Bristol, UK
(p.kennett@bristol.ac.uk)
School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol
8 Priory Road, Bristol, BS8 1TZ UK
Tel: 00 44 (0)117 9545583

Appendix 7: Consent Form for Individual Informants (In-person)

Research Title: **Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China**
To confirm your participation in this study, please read and tick the statement, and sign at the end of this page.

	Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet of the research: Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China, conducted by Yunyan Li.		
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary.		
3.	I confirm that I have received enough information about this study.		
4.	I confirm that I was informed about the aim of this study, why I got selected and the use and the storage of the data.		
5.	I understand that I do not have to answer all questions and can terminate the interview and request that my data should be erased at any time without giving any reasons.		
6.	I understand the information will be kept confidential and anonymous unless there is a risk of harm.		
7.	I understand that the data will not be used by other researchers.		
8.	I understand that all data in the project will be securely stored in a password-protected university server or in a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol for 20 years to comply with the University of Bristol Data Storage Policy.		
9.	I understand that my responses will be used for anonymous quotes in the PhD thesis and other publications from this research project with my consent.		
10.	I agree the interview will be taped in a University-owned encrypted digital voice recorder.		
11.	I agree to take part in this study.		

Participant Name:
Signature & Date:
If you have any questions, please email hw18352@bristol.ac.uk.

I have read the information and try my best to ensure that the participant understands what they are consenting to.
Researcher Name:
Signature & Date:

Appendix 8: Consent Form for Stakeholders (In-person)

Research Title: **Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China**
To confirm your participation in this study, please read and tick the statement, and sign at the end of this page.

	Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet of the research: Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China, conducted by Yunyan Li.		
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary.		
3.	I confirm that I have received enough information about this study.		
4.	I confirm that I was informed about the aim of this study, why I got selected and the use and the storage of the data.		
5.	I understand that I do not have to answer all questions and can terminate the interview and request that my data should be erased at any time without giving any reasons.		
6.	I understand the limitations of anonymity and the possibility of being recognised.		
7.	I understand that the data will not be used by other researchers.		
8.	I understand that all data in the project will be securely stored in a password-protected university server or in a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol for 20 years, to comply with the University of Bristol Data Storage Policy.		
9.	I understand that my responses will be used for anonymous quotes in the PhD thesis and other publications from this research project with my consent.		
10.	I agree the interview will be taped in a university-owned encrypted digital voice recorder.		
11.	I agree to take part in this study.		

Participant Name:
Signature & Date:
If you have any questions, please email hw18352@bristol.ac.uk.

-

I have read the information and try my best to ensure that the participant understands what they are consenting to.
Researcher Name:
Signature & Date:

Appendix 9: Consent Form for Stakeholder (Online)

Research Title: **Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China**
To confirm your participation in this study, please read and tick the statement, and sign at the end of this page.

	Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet of the research: Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China, conducted by Yunyan Li.		
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary.		
3.	I confirm that I have received enough information about this study.		
4.	I confirm that I was informed about the aim of this study, why I got selected and the use and the storage of the data.		
5.	I understand that I do not have to answer all questions and can terminate the interview and request that my data should be erased at any time without giving any reasons.		
6.	I understand the limitations of anonymity and the possibility of being recognised.		
7.	I understand that the data will not be used by other researchers.		
8.	I understand that all data in the project will be securely stored in a password-protected university server or in a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol for 20 years to comply with the University of Bristol Data Storage Policy.		
9.	I understand that my responses will be used for anonymous quotes in the PhD thesis and other publications from this research project with my consent.		
10.	I agree the interview will be taped in a university-owned encrypted digital voice recorder.		
11.	I agree to conduct the interview online.		
12.	I agree to take part in this study.		

Participant Name:
Signature & Date:
If you have any questions, please email hw18352@bristol.ac.uk.

I have read the information and try my best to ensure that the participant understands what they are consenting to.
Researcher Name:
Signature & Date:

Appendix 10: Consent Form for Individual Informants (Online)

Research Title: **Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China**
To confirm your participation in this study, please read and tick the statement, and sign at the end of this page.

	Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet of the research: Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China, conducted by Yunyan Li.		
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary.		
3.	I confirm that I have received enough information about this study.		
4.	I confirm that I was informed about the aim of this study, why I got selected and the use and the storage of the data.		
5.	I understand that I do not have to answer all questions and can terminate the interview and request that my data should be erased at any time without giving any reasons.		
6.	I understand the information will be kept confidential and anonymous unless there is a risk of harm.		
7.	I understand that the data will not be used by other researchers.		
8.	I understand that all data in the project will be securely stored in a password-protected university server or in a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol for 20 years to comply with the University of Bristol Data Storage Policy.		
9.	I understand that my responses will be used for anonymous quotes in the PhD thesis and other publications from this research project with my consent.		
10.	I agree the interview will be taped in a university-owned encrypted digital voice recorder.		
11.	I agree to conduct the interview online.		
12.	I agree to take part in this study.		

Participant Name:
Signature & Date:

If you have any questions, please email hw18352@bristol.ac.uk.

I have read the information and try my best to ensure that the participant understands what they are consenting to.
Researcher Name:
Signature & Date:

Appendix 11: Anonymity and Confidentiality Protocol

Anonymity

Data will be anonymised by recording participants' specific features and names. These codes will cover research participants' identities and other identifiable details about their jobs and working organisations. Location and the name of the workplace will be recoded to avoid the possibility of identification. When transcribing the data from the University-owned encrypted digital voice recorder, the researcher will recode or delete any sensitive information that can reveal the identity of the research participants.

Confidentiality

Only the researcher has access to all data, including documents, digital records, interview notes and transcripts. All data will be securely stored in a password-protected university server or a locked and secure location at the University of Bristol. All data will only be used for academic research. If you agree, the data will be quoted in the PhD thesis and other forms of academic output, including journal articles, book chapters and conference papers.

Research participants will also be informed about the limits of confidentiality if there are any illegal cases. The researcher will discuss these cases and scenarios with supervisors and decide whether confidentiality should be followed. All these research processes and protocols will follow the guidance and regulation of the University of Bristol.

Appendix 12: Recruitment Letter for the Stakeholders

Date:
Name and address of the potential participant:
Letter Subject: Inviting for a PhD research project
Research Title: Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China
Dear [Participant name],

My name is Yunyan Li. I am a PhD student in the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, United Kingdom. I am emailing/mailing to invite you to participate in my PhD research: Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China.

If you are familiar with women's welfare and have working experiences in supporting women's affairs, you are the targeted research participant in this research. This is a piece of research looking at women's everyday experiences and the variations among different groups of women with a child or children in rural and urban areas. It also investigates how the continuity and changes of women's experiences and work-life balance are taking place in contemporary China. The results will be formulated as a PhD thesis summited to the University of Bristol. Specific chapters will be published as a journal article, book chapter or academic reports. This research will fully follow the research procedure and ethical regulations of the University of Bristol.

This research has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. All data collected will be only sued for academic purposes. If you decide to participate in this research, I will contact you to arrange a face-to-face and individual interview based on your convenience. The interview will last for around 60 minutes. I will send you the open-ended questions that will be asked in the interview in advance. With your permission, I will use a University-owned encrypted digital voice recorder to record the interview and keep this data in a safe and password-protected drive protected by the University of Bristol. All the data will be strictly confidential and anonymous. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to refuse participation or leave the research anytime without giving any reasons. There will be no harm or penalty for participating or dropping out of this research.

I would greatly appreciate if you were willing to participate in this research. Please email me or call me if you are interested in participating in this research project. Thank you for your time.

Contact
Feel free to contact me with any questions:

Email address: hw18352@bristol.ac.uk

If you have further questions, you can also contact the researcher's supervisor, Professor Patricia Kennett.
Patricia Kennett, PhD
Professor of International and Comparative Policy Studies
Director of Education
University of Bristol, UK
(p.kennett@bristol.ac.uk)

School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol
8 Priory Road, Bristol, BS8 1TZ UK
Tel: 00 44 (0)117 9545583

Best wishes,
Yunyan Li
Ph.D. Candidate Social Policy
School for Policy Studies University of Bristol

Appendix 13: Recruitment Letter for the Individual Informants

Date:
Name and address of the potential participant:
Letter Subject: Inviting for a PhD research project
Research Title: Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China
Dear [Participant name],

My name is Yunyan Li. I am a PhD student in the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, United Kingdom. I am emailing/mailing to invite you to participate in my PhD research: Modernisation, Confucianism and Gender Justice in Rural and Urban China.

If you are a woman aged 22 to 40 and have a child or children, you are the targeted research participant in this research. This is a piece of research looking at women's everyday experiences and the variations among different groups of women with a child or children in rural and urban areas. It also investigates how the continuity and changes in women's experiences and work-life balance are taking place in contemporary China. The results will be formulated as a PhD thesis summited to the University of Bristol. Specific chapters will be published as journal articles, book chapters or academic reports. This research will fully follow the research procedure and ethical regulations of the University of Bristol.

This research has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. All data collected will be only sued for academic purposes. If you decide to participate in this research, I will contact you to arrange a face-to-face and individual interview based on your convenience. The interview will last for around 60 minutes. I will send you the open-ended questions that will be asked in the interview in advance. With your permission, I will use a University-owned encrypted digital voice recorder to record the interview and keep this data in a safe and password-protected drive protected by the University of Bristol. All the data will be strictly confidential and anonymous. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to refuse participation or leave the research anytime without giving any reasons. There will be no harm or penalty for participating or dropping out of this research.

I would greatly appreciate it if you were willing to participate in this research. Please email me or call me if you are interested in participating in this research project. Thank you for your time.

Contact
Feel free to contact me with any questions:
Email address: hw18352@bristol.ac.uk

If you have further questions, you can also contact the researcher's supervisor, Professor Patricia Kennett.

Patricia Kennett, PhD
Professor of International and Comparative Policy Studies
Director of Education
University of Bristol, UK
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Best wishes,
Yunyan Li
Ph.D. Candidate Social Policy
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